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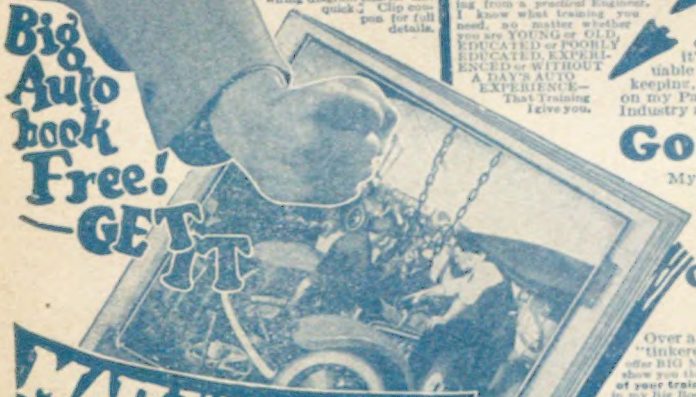

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A Ghostly Fare

THERE is progression in the ghost world as in the material, as witness this story current some years ago in London.

The vicar of a Kensington church was leaving after choir practice when a lady stepped out of the aisle and begged him excitedly to go to a nearby address. A gentleman at the point of death was anxious about his soul and wanted counsel, she said.

The clergyman followed her to a waiting taxicab which conveyed them to a mansion a short distance away. The vicar, urged by the lady, sprang out and rang the bell, telling the butler that he had heard his master was seriously ill and had sent for him.

The butler was astounded and protested his master was in the best of health. The vicar turned to the lady to get confirmation of his errand. The lady and taxi were gone.

The butler, thinking he had to do with a crazy man, was about to close the door when his master came along, and the vicar told his story. From his vague description the master of the house could not identify the lady, but said oddly enough though he was perfectly well, that he had been troubled lately about his soul and was on the point of sending for the clergyman.

The clergyman stayed about an hour and gave such advice as he could, and his new acquaintance promised to come to service next morning. He did not appear and the vicar called to see what was wrong. He was met at the door by the butler, who told him soberly that his master had died suddenly ten minutes after the departure of the vicar.

The vicar asked if he might see the body and was taken upstairs. On the dressing-table of the bedroom was a portrait of the lady who had acted as messenger.

"Might I ask who that is?" queried the vicar.

"That, sir," said the butler, "is my master's wife, who died fifteen years ago."

A Cinema Substitute

By THODA COCROFT

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

THE UNSUSPICIOUS TRAVELER

THE noon whistle was blowing when Ellen Washburn decided to park her dusty Ford in the cramped space in front of the Lakeview Hotel.

Looking for an easier place to slide into, she had gone twice around the block before she finally sashayed her battered runabout up to the curb between a swanky Harmon and a gray-coated vehicle which looked like a florist's delivery wagon.

But as she backed gingerly in, Ellen concluded that after all it wasn't a delivery wagon. Twice on her trip up from San Francisco the gray car displaying a rose-petaled "Say It with Flowers" had passed her; and each time she had wondered why any florist troubled to send perishable blossoms over the baking hot road when they might be transported by cold-storage freight.

An important funeral Ellen had first supposed; and at Garyville, where she had stopped overnight, she had glanced through the papers for news of the event. But the local *Gazette* contained no unusual obituary, nor were any banquets, weddings or tea-parties (requiring floral decorations) mentioned.

As a matter of fact, the neighborly local news had been crowded out by a scare story. All the papers she purchased along the way, even the San Francisco and Sacramento dailies, were featuring it, and the harrowing details sent a creepy sensation shooting up her spine.

It was an audacious crime designated as "murder and highway robbery." Yet in criminal records the methods of the malefactor were a complete novelty. In the news columns he was described as a car-snatcher or desperado, who haunted the State highways and seized passing automobiles, some editorial writers even going so far as to credit this mysterious harpy with the use of black magic.

This in lieu of any reasonable explanation of his *modus operandi* which apparently defied solution, since the stolen cars had suddenly disappeared from the highway within a few hundred yards of several passing cars. No shots were fired. No traces left behind. The insidious monster had reached out his taloned hand and seized his prey almost before the very eyes of the unsuspecting traveling public!

The girl's internal panic was quieted a little when she read that the first car seized by the snatcher contained the payroll for the men at the El Verde Mine. Certainly if the fiend

was just a robber out for loot he would not be attracted to her dilapidated Ford. But she became apprehensive again when she read about the second stolen car.

It was an ordinary touring car with two passengers and a camping outfit. Like the payroll car, it had been mysteriously spirited away, but no motive could be attached to its disappearance.

The passengers were in camping togs and carried little money in their pockets. Yet one week later the car had been found wrecked at the bottom of a precipice with the dead bodies of the occupants nearby.

"Hideous unmotivated cruelty!" roared the headlines of the *Gazette*. And Ellen emphatically agreed. Mile after mile that morning she had puzzled over the horrid crime, and each time the gray-coated florist car passed her she became vaguely alarmed.

The battleship hue was a strange shade for a delivery wagon. And the lantern-jawed man who was driving it had a furtive, sly look.

But finally she laughed at her notions. Just her silly jumpy nerves! Why, the queer looking vehicle couldn't possibly have any connection with the crime. And she resolutely dismissed the foolish fancy.

TURNING off her engine, the girl jumped out on the sidewalk and glanced ahead at the ornate "Say It with Flowers" label. Evidently parked for lunch, she observed. But Ellen was suddenly surprised to see a man in the driver's seat.

She stared curiously for a moment. It was not old Lantern-Jaw, as she had expected, but a small, weasel-faced man with an inquisitive, turned-up nose, sharp black eyes and a pointed chin.

"Well, where did you come from, little dear?"

The girl gasped to herself as she turned up the steps of the hotel.

"Out of the everywhere into the here," rang a foolish small voice in her brain.

Yet underneath the sing-songy line a grave concern was shaping itself in Ellen Washburn's mind.

It was more like the movies than she really relished, she reflected as she went into the Ladies Rest Room to wash off the more obtrusive layers of dust. Queer topsy-turvy world—when only a few weeks before she thought she could never get enough of the movies. Less than a month ago, Ellen mused, her Hollywood chapter was *finis*.

Speculatively she powdered her nose in the glass. It was a charming *retroussé* nose. Above it gleamed wide oval eyes. Quite frankly Ellen admired her own eyes. Yet she was perplexed over their Hollywood defeat.

Why, oh, why, she wondered, had they failed to make a hit with the omnipotent movie directors?

THREE months before when Ellen Washburn left her home in Sioux City to seek her fortune in Hollywood she had counted entirely upon her eyes to conquer a movie job.

Of course, she was aware that her impertinent nose and curly cornered mouth had always been called "adorable." But the depths and lights and changing expression of her eyes was the stuff, she was certain, that movie stars were made of.

And in spite of her protesting family she had departed for Los Angeles with only a year's slim savings in her pocketbook.

Too proud to write her parents when her two hundred dollars was gone, and the cinema world remained unmoved by her daily application for a part, Ellen reluctantly decided to cast her violet eyes in other realms.

And to a newspaper ad which stated "Refined looking lady wanted to demonstrate high-class article—must be a competent chauffeur," the girl promptly replied.

During the War she had driven an ambulance in France; and in Sioux City her married brother allowed her to serve as family chauffeur when he wasn't around to do the honors. About her driving she had no doubts. As to her "refinement of looks" she only had to cast a sidelong glance at the head salesman who interviewed her to assure the gentleman of her indubitable "ladylikeness."

And presently she learned that the "high-class article" that went with the job was a sewing machine and with it, through the north and west, she was expected to travel in a second-hand Ford, demonstrating and selling as she went along.

"When do I begin?" Ellen had promptly demanded.

Under the spell of the violet eyes the salesman had stammered a little. "You—you don't think you're too young?"

"Not at all," the girl had snapped. "I drove an ambulance in France!"

This final volley had settled the question. And engaged on a small salary and commission basis, Ellen Washburn's sewing machine peregrinations had varied from the realtor's signs of Los Angeles county to the Washington border and back to northern California again.

Yet through all her traveling the thought of the movies only occasionally reoccurred. It was not until she read of the mysterious car-snatcher that she decided that the scare story was too much like a movie plot to suit her dwindling devotion to the screen.

"Less than a month ago," she mused again, giving her tawny bobbed hair a final pat in front of the Ladies Room mirror. "Well, I'm glad I'm out of it all."

And with a decisive nod she marched out into the hotel lobby, bought a newspaper at the cigar stand and went into the dining-room.

CONSULTING her wrist-watch, she knew there was only time for a hurried lunch. From her previous trip through the district she knew there were no prospects in Lakeview and unless she made Fort Taylor by nightfall she would fall behind in her schedule. So she gave a quick order, then buried her head in her newspaper.

Ellen knew that on the road the patrons of the hotel dining-rooms were very much the same—traveling salesmen, local merchants, and traveling salesmen again.

"I can spot them a mile off," she always commented.

Of the women who traveled there were very few who attracted her, old and frumpy as a rule.

"String-bean women," she called them, "selling corsets and face lotions."

And she was not surprised to discover that with her sister-saleswomen's lack of feminine charm, her own entrance into a hotel lobby never failed to create a perceptible stir among the cigar-smoking men invariably clustered in groups around the spattered brass cuspidors.

And although this homage pleased Ellen and tended to restore the confidence of which her Hollywood experience had robbed her, she never responded in any way to the innuendos, halting suggestions of dinner and the movies, and outright invitations that were thrust every day under her pretty nose. She held herself aloof and critical and moved along her way with a proud, scornful little air.

As she sat engrossed in her news-

paper with her usual hauteur, a delay in her lunch order occasioned a fidgety look around. "Dear me, I always get a waitress who's just going on her vacation!" she fretted. But she stopped short in her mental condemnation of the tardy girl.

Directly across from her a man in a blue serge suit was looking gravely at her. And he wasn't a traveling salesman. Where on earth had she seen him before?

He had a well-shaped head, dark eyes and stubborn chin. His brown hair growing far back on his forehead and his level brows suggested to the girl an intellectual person.

Immediately Ellen tried to place him as a lecturer making a tour through the country; then she changed her mind as she suddenly remembered where she had last seen the grave, serious face. It was on the road that very morning. He had passed her in the swanky Harmon car.

She had seen him again later on at a gas station, but strangely enough he had hurried off when the gray floral car came by and he seemed to be following it up the highway to Lakeview.

LIKE herself the man had a newspaper spread out on the table before him, and she knew he had been reading the latest version of the car-snatcher story. Then the girl observed that although he was looking straight at her he did not see her at all. His dark eyes had a look of fixed absorption in some profound secret, their concentration accentuated by the thoughtful furrow drawn deep between his brows.

Then as Ellen watched him a consciousness of the pretty girl looking at him brought a quick flush to his cheeks. Ellen dimpled at his embarrassment. The next instant she saw that he was smiling in return, and in a glow of confusion she turned to her lunch which had at last arrived, ate it rapidly, paid her check and rushed out of the dining-room.

Hurrying out to her car again she saw that the lantern-jawed driver of the floral delivery wagon had returned and was in close conversation with the weasel-faced man she had seen sitting in the driver's seat only a few minutes before. And of their close hunched attitude she was immediately suspicious. Weasel, she saw, was pointing to the Harmon car parked behind her Ford.

With a sudden impulse to get within earshot of their conversation, Ellen moved to the front of her car and pretended to fuss with her engine. Standing quietly with her back turned toward them their voices came to her distinctly.

"That guy," she heard Lantern-Jaw explode, "that guy's been following me all morning."

Ellen stole a glance over her shoulder and saw the man shaking his fist indignantly at the big Harmon car.

Weasel-face cocked his head a little.

"I was watching him," he said, "when he came along. He seemed mighty anxious to park close by. Do you know who it is?"

The large man seemed to consider a moment. Then he said reflectively:

"His face did seem familiar now that you mention it. But then I never got a really good look at it. Did we have trouble with him before?"

"That's Stanley MacLellan."

Ellen strained her ears so as not to miss any revelations made about her Harmon-car friend. Her liking for him was mixed with apprehension of the revelations she expected.

The heavy individual was expressing surprise and curiosity.

"Not the guy that was fired from the force for inefficiency? Tell me more about it. That was before I

came to California. I always thought he got a dirty deal. But you never can tell."

They moved around to the front of the car and after that Ellen was able to catch only snatches of the conversation.

She gathered that the two men were detectives belonging to an agency that protected a large banking syndicate and that her Harmon-car friend had once been a trusted employee of this same agency.

Something had gone wrong with a case on which he was working. Though there had been no proof of complicity MacLellan had been discharged under a cloud of suspicion.

A famous bank robbery had remained unpunished because MacLellan had refused to entertain suspicions of a second cousin. There were rumors that he had received a share of the swag. MacLellan had sworn that he was the innocent victim of naïve trust in a distant relative and that he would not rest until that ingrate was behind bars.

"Well," thought Ellen, "he may be a crook or he may be on his way to avenge an injustice. I'll accept the latter hypothesis by way of a little vote of confidence to my first favorable impression."

The men were at the side of their car. They were speaking louder, as one does before parting.

"Well, he hasn't the reputation of an angel with me anyway," said the man whom Ellen had christened the Weasel.

"Queer, ain't it?"

"Looks peculiar. But don't let it get your goat."

"No chance. So long, Snook. You can phone ahead that everything's O. K."

"Surest thing you know," the Weasel replied. "Rogers will have the truck out to meet you and a gang in it on the long up grade on the other side of the detour. Nothing to worry about with the travel that's going over the road today. Still," he supplemented, looking warily over his shoulder, "it wont do no harm to keep an eye on that Harmon."

Lantern-Jaw nodded, shook the Weasel's hand, jumped into the driver's seat and started his engine, noisily working his machine out from between the other cars and into the street, then turned sharp left into the state highway.

For a moment Ellen watched him, then slowly got into her car. But just as she was turning out into the street she saw the man with the grave eyes come jumping down the steps of the Lakeview Hotel.

He glanced in Ellen's direction, turned for a fraction of a second toward the sidewalk where the Weasel was standing staring at him. The next moment he leaped into his car and was off, turning sharp left in the same direction in which the florist vehicle had gone.

CHAPTER II

APPARITION OR REALITY

MECHANICALLY Ellen followed him. To reach Fort Taylor she had to travel over the same road; but so rapidly had the man disappeared down the highway that she doubted her senses for a minute, wondering if his image was apparition or reality.

Later, however, chugging along at twenty-five miles an hour, she caught up to the Harmon car ten miles down the road. It was moving at a curiously slow pace for a high-powered car—at about ten miles an hour Ellen reckoned as she honked her horn and drove past.

Her grave-eyed man, she saw, was leisurely smoking a cigarette. He nodded to her solemnly as she drove by and Ellen returned the sedate

smile she reserved for the most formal social occasions.

Farther on down the road the girl passed the gray-coated vehicle. It, too, was traveling very slowly and Lantern-Jaw, she saw, was looking intently into his mirror at the road behind him. She knew it was the Harmon he was watching.

But without a backward glance at "Say It with Flowers" Ellen sailed by. For her own peace of mind she decided it was best to get to Fort Taylor as soon as possible and she pushed on her accelerator to thirty-five miles an hour.

Half an hour passed and Ellen neared the detour where some road work was going on. Here she was surprised to see Lantern-Jaw go flying past her and shoot into the detour ahead just as she was slowing down for the turn.

Presently she heard the hum of another engine approaching, and in her glass she caught a glimpse of the Harmon car overtaking her.

For half an instant Ellen thought the grave-faced man was going to stop. She even wished that he would, and was disappointed when he only waved a hand and went purring past her in the wake of "Say It with Flowers."

It was seldom, she mused, that anyone attracted her as strongly as this grave-faced man had done, and although she had only seen him for a few seconds she was fascinated by the sense of power lurking behind his solemnity.

Eagerly she hoped that she would catch up to him again, and although she found the detour was only a short one, when she came out into the open stretch of paved highway once more there was no sign of the Harmon as far ahead as she could see.

Determined to make speed the girl went shooting over the bumps until her teeth chattered, still hoping for a glimpse of the Harmon or even a sight of the florist car.

But Ellen's trip to Fort Taylor was uneventful as far as the Harmon or the florist car were concerned. Cars passed her in droves but none that interested her. Then, on the long up grade, she was surprised to see a big truck from the Newsome Construction Company with a gang of men in it, waiting along the side of the road.

From her last trip to Fort Taylor she knew the big construction company was putting in a mammoth dam in Upper Lake and had a gang of several hundred men at work on it. Certainly, she figured, the Construction Company's truck was the same the Weasel had spoken about to Lantern-Jaw in front of the Lakeview Hotel.

Yet what was its connection with the floral car? And why did it stand patiently waiting beside the road when "Say It with Flowers" had already passed along the highway far ahead of her? Or had Lantern-Jaw arrived ahead of time and missed the truck completely?

PUZZLING over the engine Ellen rode into Fort Taylor, left her car in front of the hotel, engaged a room for the night and then proceeded to the general store to demonstrate to The Home-Women's Club the Wee Wizard Sewing Machine.

An hour later the girl returned to the hotel and after freshening up for dinner went down on the open veranda to read until dinner was served.

As Ellen sat rocking and reading she saw the Harmon car draw up in front of the hotel and out of it came the grave-faced man. Swiftly he marched up the steps and was turning in at the desk when he suddenly caught sight of the girl and stopped with a cry of astonishment.

"You—you——" he burst out abruptly. "How did you get here so fast?"

Ellen's violet eyes widened with surprise.

"Why, I've been here hours—two hours, to be exact. Don't tell me you're just getting in?"

The man frowned as he replied:

"Just this moment."

At once Ellen flashed sympathy.

"You had a breakdown——"

"Nothing of the kind."

His tone was cutting.

The girl's mouth crinkled into a smile.

"You're joking," she murmured.

The man moved toward her impatiently.

"I wish to God I were!" he cried with a queer catch in his voice.

Ellen stared, half in fear, half in curiosity. What sort of lunacy was this? she asked herself.

The next moment the man was questioning her intently.

"Did you pass the gray vehicle, the florist wagon? Has it come in? And how long ago? Was the construction truck guarding it?" he asked in a breath.

Ellen looked nonplussed.

"All those questions at once!"

"Please—please," the man urged with a fierce earnestness lighting his eyes.

And Ellen drew back a little to shield herself from the devastating force behind the strange man's eyes.

"The gray vehicle passed me," she replied in a very small voice, "just before the detour. But I didn't see it again. The construction truck you mention was waiting beside the road on the long up grade."

In a puzzled voice the man broke in.

"I don't remember the grade," he protested. "Why, I came out from the detour just a little below here. Jove!" he sighed, "that detour was a fright."

As if listening to a riddle Ellen cocked her head on one side.

"Are you quite accustomed to driving?" she ventured.

The man flushed indignation.

"I most certainly am, Miss—Miss?"

"Washburn," the girl supplemented.

"Miss Washburn."

"Well, I just can't understand," burst out Ellen, "why you should talk about a long detour when I was over it in my Ford in less than five minutes. Really Mr.—Mr.——?"

She paused with an expectant smile.

"My name is MacLellan," he said. "Stanley MacLellan."

The man's deep brown eyes sought Ellen's violet eyes eagerly.

"I know, Miss Washburn, that you're going to help me!"

Unflinchingly, Ellen returned the man's direct gaze. There was nothing, she suddenly decided, that she wouldn't do if it would help her grave, wistful friend who was so swiftly hypnotizing her.

"I—I——" she stuttered in reply.

But she got no further. The construction company's truck had suddenly pulled up in front of the hotel and the gang of men getting out of it were talking in loud excitement. Soon others joined them and the babble increased to a roar.

A wildly clacking, jabbering group rushed into the hotel. Other men dashed after them seething excitedly.

"What is it? What's happened?" gasped the girl.

"The payroll," MacLellan replied, "for the whole construction company."

"*What?*"

"It was in the gray car with the florist sign on it. But that decoration was only a ruse."

"But where is it? What's happened?"

MacLellan shrugged his wide shoulders.

"Gone—like the others."

Sharply, Ellen cornered the man.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I shall inquire," he courteously replied, looking squarely into her eyes and turned quickly and followed the excited crowd into the hotel. A moment later he returned.

"I was correct in my deduction," he said. "The payroll car is long overdue. They've covered the road from here to Lakeview and back again. There's not a sign of it anywhere. Evidently you were the last person who saw it. You said it passed you on the detour?"

Horror congealed the girl's lips. It was difficult for her to form her words.

"You—you don't think it's been spirited away like the El Verde payroll car and the other?"

"Exactly," the man nodded.

"The car-snatcher!" Ellen breathed in a frightened whisper.

"The same."

"But how so soon—so *suddenly?*" Ellen gasped.

Then again she found the man's dark eyes looking fixedly at her.

"Do you want to help me find out?" he asked her in a low voice.

"A—yes——" she faltered.

"Then come at once," he said quickly, "and show me the road you traveled over this afternoon."

"Why—a—yes——" Ellen's voice trailed off uncertainly.

MacLellan broke in upon her.

"After that I will show you the road over which I traveled."

Tremulously the girl assented. There was a quivering note of fear in her voice, but she bravely followed the man down the steps, into his Harmon car and they drove off rapidly together.

CHAPTER III

"SAY IT WITH FLOWERS"

UNDER the last rays of the setting sun the highway glistened like a silver ribbon before their eyes and down the long grade they sped, MacLellan commenting briefly on the road as they went along.

"But I can't understand," pursued Ellen, "how in the world you ever got off on such a detour. You see the road's in good condition. And it's only below at the long steel bridge where it's necessary to go around."

MacLellan nodded.

"Wait till we get to the detour," he said, abruptly dismissing the subject.

For a moment the girl felt as if he had slapped her face and she turned away from him with cool indifference to look at the wooded country around them. She was startled by his next question.

"Do you like to sell sewing machines?"

"How—how do you know?"

"I watched you in Garyville. You carry some of them around with you, don't you?"

"Er—yes—that is to demonstrate. I take orders, you know."

"But do you usually do this sort of thing?"

"No."

And then all at once Ellen found herself relating her Hollywood experience, and for the first time she saw a twinkle dancing in the man's brown eyes.

"I know some movie directors," he offered. "It might possibly be——"

"Awfully good of you," Ellen broke in with a little gasp. "But I don't think—I really don't think I want to go back to the movies again."

"What would you like to do?"

"Lots of things."

For a minute she looked at the man

beside her. Her face was soft and her eyes shone in the twilight and when she spoke she raised them to him and smiled provocatively.

"The sort of thing you do, for instance!"

MacLellan laughed guardedly. Then he looked down at Ellen and his expression changed. The girl's gleaming hair and the curves of her softly rounded figure gently outlined through her clinging dust-colored crepe, slowly transformed his watchfulness into open admiration.

Ellen caught the look and the creamy glow in her face deepened.

"I've got you all figured out as a second Sherlock Holmes," she persisted.

"Oh," grinned MacLellan evasively. "You want an identification tag?"

The airy reply Ellen intended died upon her lips. They were nearing the detour. She saw the red sign looming up in the dusk. MacLellan was looking anxiously around.

"This is the place," Ellen announced, "where I came back into the highway again."

The man scrutinized it carefully and they followed the detour around as far as the steel bridge. Here they came back onto the public highway again. Then MacLellan stopped his car and turned to the girl.

"Now I'm going to try to find that detour I came over this afternoon. You're not afraid to go with me?"

Ellen shook her head, her nerves fluttering inwardly, but she was resolved the man should not see the little panic she felt inside, and she strained for a natural laugh.

"My goodness, no," she said shakily.

TURNING back again at the steel bridge, they started slowly over the detour once more, MacLellan watching the road to the left with eagle-eyed intensity. Then all at once he stopped his car and pointed to a faintly traced left-turning road with several logs across it. The headlights of the car picked out a sign on which was scrawled the single word, *Dangerous.*

"There," he said decisively, "that road was marked *detour* this afternoon. The danger sign was standing in the middle of this very road we're on."

"But," Ellen protested, "there was no danger sign when I came along."

MacLellan made no comment but jumped quickly out of his car, removed the logs and danger sign from the left-turning road and slowly started up.

But bumps and hummocks lined the entire way and they joggled along, bouncing and bumping in their seats for an uncomfortable two miles. MacLellan still watched the road to the left, driving slowly and using his searchlight as he went along.

Beside him Ellen sat pale and still hardly daring to breathe. At last she spoke in a whisper.

"It's just a wood road," she said. "We'll get lost over here."

"Don't worry," he reassured her. "It comes out several miles above and cuts back into the highway again.

Then in silence they traveled along for over thirty minutes, the road winding in and out among the trees, across dried creek beds and over small hills and valleys.

At a well-defined turning the man stopped his car again. He was flashing his searchlight on a faintly traced road turning off again to the left. And again logs barred the way, but there was no signal of danger.

"Down there!" MacLellan said softly between his teeth.

"What?" cried Ellen.

"The gray payroll car. That's where it went. I was certain I saw it through the trees right up until I made this turn."

ELLEN'S face lit up with an intuitive flash.

"It was the driver!" she exclaimed with the enthusiasm of discovery. "He did it deliberately. Why, he must have an accomplice who helped him get away with it."

Then her voice trailed off into doubt as she remembered the conversation in Lakeview.

"Do you know I saw him talking to a man in Lakeview. It was all very mysterious. Are they really both detectives?"

"Yes, two of the best on the force. The one in Lakeview was Snook. He doesn't like me, but then he thinks he has good reasons."

The girl tapped her toe nervously while MacLellan got out of the car again to move away the logs on the new road turning left. A shadowy doubt clouded her exuberance. Was her friend a detective *now* or was he an outlaw? Did his sad experience make him too bitter to remain a good citizen or was he striving to prove his own innocence in the past? It was a harassing question. Should she trust him?

MacLellan got back into the car again, but before starting his engine he stopped a moment.

"What's the matter?" Ellen asked in a strained voice.

"Er—nothing. Nothing. I only thought I heard another car coming along that road."

"What road?" cried the girl.

MacLellan gestured to the road they had just come over.

"Behind us," he said. "I think someone is following us."

Ellen's eyes widened.

"You—you——" she panted, her heart thumping painfully.

"Can you handle a gun?" the man broke in, thrusting a .45 Colt in her hand. "It's an automatic. And it's loaded."

The girl grasped the steel handle with an unsteady hand.

"And don't use it unless I tell you to. Can I depend upon you?"

The man looked sternly at her, watching her face grow pale then flame out crimson. She was breathing fast as though she had been running, and under the yellow lace in the front of her dress he saw her bosom rise and fall.

"Yes," she answered tensely. "All right. Please go ahead."

Immediately they shot out into the faintly defined road that turned again to the left, bumping and jouncing along more violently than before. Ellen held herself rigid. She felt hot all over and the palm of her hand clutching the automatic was unpleasantly moist.

Carefully MacLellan turned his flashlight along the roadway.

"By God!" he suddenly exclaimed, throwing on the emergency brake with an impact that sent Ellen forward in her seat.

"There it is!" And with his flashlight he picked out the gray-coated florist's vehicle with its ornate "Say It with Flowers" sign tilted over under a tree several yards off the road.

The girl's lips twitched.

"I told you," she said, "Lantern-Jaw had an accomplice. You see he drove it over here, wrecked it and got away with the payroll!"

"Not so fast," MacLellan broke in. "He was one of the most trustworthy men in a powerful detective agency. I've learned not to mistrust men on shabby circumstantial evidence."

Ellen felt rebuked.

"It might be that way," she said defiantly.

"Well," the man parried, "let's go over and have a look at the flower wagon's remains. I'll take the gun if you don't mind."

And Ellen handed over the automatic.

Then with the searchlight they picked their way through the brush until they came to the tilted vehicle.

"Better go around this way," the man suggested, pulling Ellen to the right.

Then all at once he clutched her arm fiercely.

"Stop!" he cried.

Ellen looked down with a start. Stretched out on the ground before them was the dead body of the lantern-jawed detective.

Horrified by the dead man's glossy eyes staring up at her out of the darkness, the girl let out an involuntary shriek and shrank back from the ghastly spectacle. Without knowing it she had stepped into a pool of dark red blood which looked like thick black ink under the glare of the electrict flashlight.

"Murdered!"

With a very white face she leaned against MacLellan trying to get rid of the choking sensation in her throat.

MacLellan pointed to the man's torn clothing and the bloody gashes on his face.

"But he put up a fight—what?"

Ellen looked at the body with a sort of dreadful courage.

"He was defending the car all the time. And I thought he had an accomplice. It's horrible. I can't stand it any longer," and she buried her face in her hands.

An instant later she looked up again startled half out of her wits by the headlights of a machine turned full upon them. Neither of them had heard a car approaching and the abrupt blinding glare bursting at them out of the darkness turned her knees to water.

With reassuring strength, MacLellan caught hold of her and whispered in her ear:

"Don't be scared, child. I'll take care of everything."

THERE was a moment of sickening suspense. Ellen's eyes smarted with anxiety as she stared at the powerful lights. Hair-raising anticipation of the car-snatcher swooping down on them sent tingling goose-flesh up her spine. Quiveringly she waited.

Then the tension snapped. She slumped weakly forward as though she had passed through a bad illness when she saw coming toward them through the glaring pathway of the headlights the weasel-faced detective and three policemen.

"What's this?"

It was Detective Snook speaking.

MacLellan pointed out the body of the murdered chauffeur. Immediately the four men flashed their lights over it, scrutinizing the body carefully. Then the detective turned to MacLellan.

"You interested in murders, MacLellan?" he asked with a nasty inflection.

"Casually," MacLellan shrugged. "This young lady and I were driving by——"

But Snook cut in on him.

"After this," he snarled, "better not poke into matters that don't concern you. By the way," he said, "didn't I see you in Lakeview at noon today? You left the hotel right after the driver here," he went on, indicating the murdered chauffeur. "Maybe you can tell me what happened to him?"

Ellen caught her breath. So! The detective suspected her friend MacLellan of the murder.

The insinuating voice terrified the girl, but she was confident he wasn't guilty—her strong friend with the grave, honest eyes.

A discomforting memory suddenly broke in upon her. MacLellan had followed Lantern-Jaw over the strange road! For some inexplicable reason he had not come to Fort Tay-

lor along the highway. Why had he left the road? How could she explain his interest in the payroll car? What was his connection with the murder? He might have been guilty before or injustice may have thrown him into evil ways. Was he using her for his own wicked ends?

Disquieted by these unanswerable questions, Ellen stood helplessly by listening to MacLellan's calm words of self-defense.

"I can tell you nothing more than you already see. I was in Lakeview for lunch today. And later I met my friend Miss Washburn in Fort Taylor. This evening we came out for a drive. It was uneventful until we saw that car there," he said, pointing to the florist wagon.

"Thinking the driver was in trouble, we stopped to offer help, and only this moment we found the body lying there. Your experts will tell you the man was murdered several hours ago."

The girl muffled her sigh of relief. So he was counting on her as a friend! Well, she would not betray him.

The Weasel, she saw, eyed MacLellan suspiciously.

"All right!" he snapped at them. "Get out, you two!"

And Ellen grabbed the man's arm and they started back to their car. But just as they were getting in again Detective Snook came flying at them holding up his hands.

"I may need you two later on," he bellowed belligerently. "Where are you off to?"

"Fort Taylor Inn," MacLellan tersely replied.

Snook's voice was threatening.

"You'll hear from me tomorrow."

MacLellan started his engine and whisked the car around without condescending to reply. The next instant they were speeding back over the bumpy road to the highway once more.

CHAPTER IV.

SATISFACTION

THE ride back to Fort Taylor was a quiet one. Appalled by the man's unfriendly silence, Ellen only once ventured to break it.

"You're going back to the Inn?" she asked him when they had worked their way to the steel bridge.

"Why not?"

Stumped for a reply, the girl shook her head and the pall of silence fell over them again.

Finally, as they neared Fort Taylor, MacLellan suggested dinner. But the hotel dining-room was closed. Ellen said she was just as well pleased. She knew she was too excited to eat and they contented themselves with sandwiches and milk at a lunch counter. Then MacLellan impetuously announced that he was off to bed and they returned directly to the hotel.

A moment later under the dim lights of the veranda, when he shook hands with her and said good-night, he stood staring at her as if suddenly aware of her softly breathing figure before him. Ellen noticed a gleam in his dark eyes.

"Thank you, Miss Washburn." His lips parted in a smile. "I'm ever so grateful."

His eyes lingered gently over her tawny head shining so under the porch lights.

"Next time I take you riding I hope it will be pleasanter."

"Next time?" Ellen questioned softly, her cheeks flushed as if the sun had burned them.

The man's eyes deepened with admiration.

"If I may have the pleasure."

A sense of exhilaration stirred in the girl as she met his open approval. Heavens, how clear his eyes were! Even if she could not explain his motives in following Lantern-Jaw's car she was certain that she would stick up for him under any inquisition. And she returned the hard pressure of his hand, calling back a quick good-night as she sped down the lobby and across the hall to her room.

NUMBER 101, the room assigned to Ellen by the clerk at the Fort Taylor Inn, was on the first floor overlooking the broad veranda.

Although she had planned to go immediately to bed, the girl found she was too restless to sleep. She felt on fire with excitement, and wrapping herself in her negligee she sat down in the darkness near the window to cool her hot cheeks and quiet the lively fancies dancing about in her brain.

Outside a waning moon shone weirdly from behind a black acacia. The warm, rich odor of its blossoms wafted into her room and for a full hour she dreamed at the window. Then out of the stillness of the night low voices on the veranda aroused her to sharp attention.

"Warrant——!"

"Swear out a warrant! He has a bad reputation anyway."

——"guilty as hell—said the girl was a friend of his——"

"Bunk!"

——"just picked her up tonight when he got in."

"Oh, she's O.K. Sells sewing machines. I seen her here before."

"Yep. Smart guy."

"Trying to get fresh with her?"

WITH a shock of agitation Ellen recognized the Weasel's voice. There were two other men with him. She only caught broken phrases, but she knew they were talking about her, and with electrified attention she strained her ears to listen.

"Yes, sir. First thing in the morning."

"Before he gets away!"

The voices trailed off into whispers. Then she heard shuffling steps and the men outside were gone. It was her friend MacLellan, she realized with a feverish quiver, and not herself who was in danger. They were planning to arrest him on the suspicion that he was an accomplice in the murder.

On fire with the desire to protect her friend, Ellen immediately began to dress, fumbling with her clothes in the darkness in a fluster of irritation. At last she slipped into her dress, rolled her stockings snugly below her knees and was fastening the buckles on her shoes when she was startled by a faint brustling.

Alive to the smallest noise, the girl's nerves twitched acutely. Had anything whisked into the room?

For an instant she thought someone was outside of her window again. She waited a tense moment scarcely daring to breathe, but only the hushed silence of the night laden with the warm fragrance of acacia came floating up to her, and she decided she was mistaken.

"Probably a moth or a bat," she concluded, "flying blindly into the darkness."

She glided gently across her room toward the open window once more. Then she stopped short as she heard the unexpected crumple of paper under her feet and nervously bent down and groped over the carpet. On the floor she found a crumpled envelope. It was sealed and folded over into a curious triangular shape.

WARILY opening it in the darkness, the girl strained to make out the con-

tents. But it was useless without a light, and her keen sense of caution warned her not to snap on the electricity.

In a quiver of suspense she began moving about her room. On the dresser she remembered a night candle, but matches were the problem. There were none on the washstand and she was doubtful if there were any in her bag.

Soundlessly she fumbled through her suitcase and with a throb of joy at last extracted a matchbox. Then, stealthily moving into the clothes closet, she lit the candle and began to read the mysterious letter:

When you wake up in the morning, will you please put in a long-distance call for the Highway Commissioner in Sacramento and get all the particulars about the detour at Steel Bridge? I'll repay you for the call in a few days. I wish I could tell you what a brick you have been. Perhaps some day I can show you. I'm on a mission of revenge and justice. More I cannot say.

S. MACL.

With a sigh of satisfaction, Ellen quickly blew out the light and slid out into the darkness of her room again with the letter crushed in her hand.

Although he had not said it in words, the whole content of the letter indicated that he was gone, else why should he ask her to telephone for him? Why should he promise to repay her in a few days?

Had he heard the Weasel's threat, too, she wondered, crossing stealthily to the open window again. Was he afraid of the detective? Was he really a partner in the guilt?

Anxiously she looked out trying to discern the shiny outline of his big Harmon which he had parked directly in front of the hotel. Then the girl drew back in a relief curiously edged with apprehension.

Stanley MacLellan's car was gone —gone.

CHAPTER V.

RECOGNITION

A MORNING demonstration of the Wee Wizard Sewing Machine kept Ellen in Fort Taylor until noon the following day. But at the Ladies Furnishing Store where she was demonstrating, she managed to find time to put in the long-distance call.

The Highway Commissioner was obliging over the telephone and she carefully put down the information he gave about the detour in her prospect's notebook. At twelve-thirty the same day she started out in her Ford again heading south toward Beeber City.

During the weeks that followed Ellen eagerly followed the daily papers, fluttering with anxiety every time the newest clues on the car-snatcher crime occupied the front page.

But as the insoluble crime-riddle not only baffled Detective Snook and the state police but the entire Pacific Coast, public interest in the case gradually dwindled away.

In reverse ratio Ellen's interest increased. She was consumed with curiosity over it all, alternately reassured and fearful by turns of MacLellan's dubious connection with the crime.

His promise of *a few days* had lengthened out to weeks. Was his note to her only a ruse? Did he really intend to see her again? How did he know where to find her? Had she impressed him with her company's name in case he needed to reach her?

FRETFULLY, Ellen reviewed the affair and re-reviewed it again, ending each time at a high pitch of exasperation. If he had been less attractive, less compelling, less twinkling under his gravity, she would

probably be able to dismiss him entirely from her mind. But his image persisted in spite of her annoyance.

At every turn in the road during the long tour south, she hopefully anticipated a glimpse of the Harmon car riding toward her.

A few days later, as she was running in over the highway at dusk, attempting to reach Los Angeles before nightfall, the girl became obsessed with the notion that a car was following her. But in the dim twilight she couldn't make sure of it.

The car was of a dark color and looked like a sedan. And promptly when Ellen turned on her lights she saw the lights on the car behind her flash into simultaneous radiance and shine blindingly in her mirror the rest of the way.

Several times the girl slowed down to a stop, attempting to force the strange car to pass her, but each time she started ahead again the glaring headlights were still reflected in her glass, the persistent car keeping about twenty yards behind her.

At last convinced that someone was shadowing her, Ellen, in a nervous flutter, decided to stop at a wayside hotel instead of making the city as she had originally intended.

Just as she had parked her Ford under a spluttering street light in front of the hotel, she was startled by a man's figure coming toward her out of the darkness. He was dressed in a conventional chauffeur's uniform, leather puttees, visored cap and trim covert cloth suit.

Over his eyes he wore goggles of a purplish color which left only his chin and mouth exposed. But something about the lower lines of the pale brown face and the shadowy smile flickering across the sensitive lips struck her with a thud of recognition.

Then the man removed his driving glasses and she found two disconcertingly attentive eyes looking at her.

Like a strenous, eager spirit Ellen danced toward him.

"It's you!" she cried. "I'm so relieved!"

She seemed in a glow of happiness, so deep and rich was the color of her cheeks, her eyes, her lips.

"You scared me half to death. I thought you were a speed cop."

MacLellan took her grimy hand in both of his own. "I'm so glad to see you again! Let me ask you something."

"What?" stammered Ellen, anxiety lighting her eyes.

"I've been trailing you for miles and miles. Don't you ever *eat?*"

The girl's laugh rippled out like a tune as they went into the hotel dining-room together. After they had ordered she found herself watching the amber glints in his dark eyes with fixed attention.

In his absence she had forgotten the stubborn set of his jaw, the disdainful flare of his nostrils, the bronzed color in his cheeks. And she burned with an eagerness to print the image of him on her mind that it might not slip away from her again.

For a moment neither of them spoke. MacLellan's sensitive lips seemed to be shaping an avowal which his eyes dared not confirm, but at her sidelong stare he turned his head away like a bashful school boy, reticent with the sudden consciousness of his first sweetheart.

Ellen felt her heart beat loudly and to dispel the awkwardness of the moment she pretended a formal manner.

"What happened to the Harmon?"

"I've got a new car. A different kind. But tell me," he swiftly veered. "What did you hear from the California Road Commissioner?"

FROM her handbag Ellen extracted her notebook. Her tone was brisk, but her eyes were soft and glistening.

"He told me the short detour at the steel bridge was the only one on the Lakeview highway. Isn't it curious that you got sidetracked on such a long, funny road?"

MacLellan's gaiety evaporated.

"I thought so. The car-snatcher was responsible for that detour. But he routed me out of it before I caught up to the payroll car."

"Sleuth!"

At her retort MacLellan's eyes pierced uncomfortably through the girl and she quailed under their peculiar glitter.

"Do you want to go along and help me?" he asked queerly.

Ellen fidgeted her hands. Behind his strange tone there lurked a light in his eyes that she did not know.

"I—— I——" she stammered.

"It will be dangerous," he warned. "I can't depend on outside help. I have a personal mission involved. I need help and I can't ask for it."

The girl's eyes swiftly challenged him.

"I'm not afraid!"

"That's why I want you."

His gaze was cool and detached. Then he turned on her abruptly.

"Be ready to leave at sunrise, will you? You can fix it up with your company by phone."

"But where," demanded Ellen, "where are we going?"

An enigmatic expression moulded itself into MacLellan's face.

"Sometimes you get stung by the same bee in another place," he slowly replied. "And sometimes you get stung in the same place by another bee. But," he finished emphatically, "you never get stung by the same bee in the same place!"

"You've found the *other* place?"

"Practically."

"How do you know?"

MacLellan lowered his voice.

"Saturday at noon five hundred men are paid off in cash at the Ajo Copper Mines."

"Ajo? Where on earth——?"

"Arizona. Southwest in the desert. Out of reach of the railroads. An armored Franken car carrying the payroll leaves the city tomorrow morning."

Ellen's voice tingled with excitement.

"But what makes you think the car-snatcher——"

"Hush!" MacLellan abruptly warned, glancing around the room to make sure that no one was eavesdropping. "On the highway forty miles out of Ajo there is a *new short detour.*"

The man paused for a significant instant.

"A few days ago there was a sand storm out there. The Arizona Road Commissioner told me over the phone this morning they would be working on it for two weeks."

Ellen frowned in bewilderment.

"But if it's only a short detour," she began.

MacLellan cut in upon her.

"The one *you* took outside of Fort Taylor was short, too, but I drew a long one."

Ellen winced and her heart contracted swiftly. She had suddenly precipitated herself into a new world, she reflected—a dangerous world of adventure. Already she half dreaded the experience ahead and yet she would not relinquish it for anything on earth.

"I will see you at five-thirty," she murmured as she bade MacLellan good-night.

CHAPTER VI

DOUBLE CONTROL

AT DAYBREAK the next morning she met him in front of the hotel, feeling secretly apprehensive inside but outwardly fresh and clear-eyed,

and keyed to a high-pitched exhilaration.

Her first shock of surprise burst in upon her when she saw the interior of MacLellan's new car. Instead of a sedan as she had supposed when he was following her the night before, it looked like an ordinary touring car.

With a flourish MacLellan invited her in. But as she started toward the front seat she felt herself forcibly lifted into the rear seat of the car. Indignantly she looked at MacLellan.

But her eyes suddenly widened with amazement. Directly facing her was a steering wheel, gear shift, clutch, self-starter, brakes, lights, speedometer and horn.

"Good heavens, the car's bewitched. I'm seeing double!"

Grinning with amusement MacLellan leaped in beside her.

"Double control," the man announced. "Complete in every detail. Start her off and see how she goes."

Ellen hesitated uncertainly, wondering if the big car would respond to her steering from the back seat. Falteringly she started the engine.

"It's like driving a horse by his tail!"

The big machine purred pleasantly and, reassured by the normal vibration, Ellen swung the car at last into the street and started off in the quiet dawn.

To her amazement Ellen found that the machine was sensitized with an almost instantaneous response to her guidance from the rear-seat control. From twenty-five miles she speeded it to thirty, then forty, then fifty; then threw on the brakes and came to an abrupt standstill.

"Works like magic!" she exclaimed with delight.

MacLellan raised serious eyes.

"Nothing less than magic will matter," he said, getting into the front seat and taking the forward wheel.

WHEN they drove into Los Angeles, Ellen abandoned her back seat and moved in beside him. MacLellan was talking excitedly, but she noticed a curious change in him soon after they sighted the big blue Franken which he had identified as the Ajo Mines payroll car, leaving the Federal Reserve Bank in Los Angeles with three watchful guards inside.

"If you're not a detective," Ellen exclaimed, admiring his astuteness in locating the Franken in the dark alleyway near the bank, "what are you?"

The man was silent, watching the Franken car ahead of them.

"There's an Arab proverb," he finally said, turning toward her with a strange fierceness, "the crying cat catches nothing."

Ellen's lips compressed into a thin line and she ebbed away from him in silent hostility. But an hour later she broke the stillness between them with a little taunt.

"Did that Arab cat get your tongue?"

But MacLellan ignored the girl completely.

Exasperated by his rudeness, Ellen bit her lips, her eyes alive with the emotions of anger and chagrin and an odd, haunting wistfulness. How dare he be rude? How dare he insult her?

In a sarcastic voice she began to mock him. But presently she found that even her sarcasm was a failure. Rigid, unbending, his face as hard as stone, he sat oblivious to her, his glittering eyes fixed on the Franken car ahead, his body erect and inflexible beside her.

"I hate him!" she said to herself. "I'll teach him a lesson! I'll never,

never speak a decent word to him again!"

Was she making a monkey of herself, a fool, a dupe, to come away on a wild chase without even knowing exactly where she was going? Had she misjudged her clear-eyed man?

An interruption came an hour later. It was a single sharp expletive from MacLellan.

"Damn!"

And in spite of the fact that she had resolved never to speak a kind word to him again Ellen found herself anxiously asking: "What's the matter?"

"We've lost them," he tartly replied referring to the Franken. "How the deuce did they get away?"

Ellen shook her head sulkily and another long silence followed unbroken until they stopped for a quick lunch at Hacienda. Here she ordered a sandwich and a glass of milk.

MacLellan looked up with concern. "Nothing more?"

AFTER his indifference Ellen hated his sudden solicitude. She would not spare him now.

"There's an Esquimo proverb," she mimicked, "maybe it's Portuguese, but it says that generosity never glosses rudeness."

McLellan covered his eyes with his hands for a moment. When he raised his head his coldness was gone, but he looked tired. His lips twisted in a faint smile.

"I apologize."

He sat staring abstractedly at the floor. His mind, the girl saw, was a thousand miles away.

"In a tight squeeze I'm a lucky dog," he finally murmured. "But dash it all," he went on, "you never know when the worm will turn." He sat with clenched fists thinking.

Ellen was disquieted with his alarm. And her nerves fluttered unpleasantly when they finished their meal and started back to the car, for it was then that MacLellan left her alone for a few minutes while he went on a mysterious errand to the general store.

Continuing on down the side street to the spot where they had parked, she was startled, as she rounded the corner, to see two men examining their machine. One had opened the hood and was looking at the engine; and the other stood on the running board inspecting the interior of the car.

Although she was confident that the canvas shrouding the rear-seat control had not been removed, the girl's heart bounded with an unreasonable fear.

At the same instant the man at the engine, seeing her coming, turned quickly away, leaving only a fleeting glimpse of flat shoulders and spindly legs as he hurried into a doorway.

The second man standing on the running board stepped down awkwardly as the girl approached, his protruding eyes popping out at her above hollow cheeks. He tipped his hat with an embarrassed air.

Who was it? What a nerve! And haughtily tossing her head Ellen got back into the car, ignoring him completely. Then quick suspicions harassed her mind.

"Queer," she said to herself, "that Spindle-Legs reminds me of the Weasel."

She tapped a nervous tattoo on the wheel as she waited. Finally MacLellan appeared around the corner bending under the weight of a heavy oil can.

"What's the idea?" exclaimed Ellen. "We've got enough oil on board already to run a battleship."

Without answering her the man fastened it onto the running board rack and Ellen's inquisitiveness flick-

ered away as she hastily related the story of the two men. Immediately MacLellan asked for a detailed description of the second man.

When she finished he made a curly comment and, with Ellen in the seat beside him, shot the car out of Hacienda and onto the open highway once more.

CHAPTER VII

DETOUR

A LITTLE later he turned to the girl with a familiar twinkle in his eye.

"Do you see anyone coming?"

In spite of her irritation over his coolness the girl twisted around in her seat and good-humoredly replied: "A Ford."

"No more traffic?"

"I think there's another car behind the Ford."

To her amazement MacLellan slowed down until the Ford had passed them and the car behind came into view.

Then Ellen twisted around in her seat again.

"The Weasel, sure enough, in the other car!" she exclaimed. "Old Pop-Eyes with him and four other men in the back seat!"

But MacLellan did not wait for more. Vehemently stepping on the gas the big car leaped into a terrific speed, tearing into a mileage that made the girl's ears sing and her eyes smart with tears.

Then, unexpectedly, the man retarded his speed.

"Oh, don't mind me!" mocked Ellen.

MacLellan gripped her arm. And all at once, for the first time since that morning, she saw the armored Franken car just ahead of them. It was moving deliberately along.

"Hallelujah!" The girl's voice tingled.

But not a muscle moved in the man's inscrutable face.

Slowing down, almost to a stop, he forced a touring car of campers which they had passed only a few minutes before to come between the Franken and their own machine.

But even as they partially concealed themselves behind the intervening car, Ellen saw a wary pair of eyes watching them through the little rear window in the Franken. All at once she remembered a casual remark of MacLellan's about the armed guards inside. "Expert marksmen," he had said. "Crack shots."

And her pounding heart skipped a beat. "D'you think they see us?" she inquired.

MacLellan's eyes met hers and looked away. Then he pulled out a road map and studied it while the girl put a guiding hand on the wheel.

When he looked up again Ellen saw that his eyes darkened and she was startled when he slipped a cold hand over hers.

"Wish us luck!" he said, crushing her hand till it ached.

His eyes, Ellen noticed, were sad beyond measure.

Ahead of them the Franken had whisked forward again far out of sight. Behind them Detective Snook was overtaking them once more.

"Back seat if you please, Ellen." His voice was grave with authority. "The detour's only a few miles away. And be ready to take control whenever I say the word."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Swiftly she straddled the canvas camouflage and seated herself at the rear wheel.

MacLELLAN was speeding up the car again. They passed the campers like a shot. Ahead stretched a clear, sandy road straight toward a haze-hidden hill. Not a machine in sight as far as the girl could see. And as

the man opened up the throttle they flew forward again at a mad, reckless rate.

Stinging in her face Ellen felt sharp pebbles flying and cutting bits of sand. Hunching herself over dizzily in the rear seat, she clung desperately to the wheel in front of her.

"Have a heart," she called.

But her voice was lost in the roar of the engine. On they raced at a mile-devouring rate.

Then with a gasping sound the car came to a standstill.

"Saints in heaven!"

Ellen reached for the solace of her powder puff, but right in the act she stopped abruptly. Directly across the way there loomed a carelessly painted sign (with a pointing hand):

DANGEROUS ARROYA
DETOUR LEFT

The sand storm had almost eradicated the road. But just ahead, pulling up the hill to the left, was the Franken car.

"Look at Bright Eyes in there!"

Ellen pointed toward the two wary eyes watching from the rear window again. Ahead of the Franken she saw the road lying clear and empty with no other travelers in view. Then as their car shot ahead again she called to MacLellan in alarm:

"Are you out of your senses?"

In spite of the marksmen's menacing eyes she saw he was doggedly following close behind.

A crescent curve for half a mile. Then suddenly a second sign confronted them. An indicative arrow pointed; it was lettered neatly in red and tacked onto a stand that sprawled warningly across the road:

WASHOUT AHEAD
DETOUR LEFT

The Franken, she saw, had turned rapidly to the left as the sign advised into an invitingly level stretch of road and was making speed again. But just as MacLellan turned to follow, Ellen excitedly tapped his back.

"Man over there," she whispered hoarsely, "behind the mesquite. I think he's got a gun!"

Instantly MacLellan whipped out his automatic. At the same moment a workman appeared from behind the feathery branches of the mesquite holding a shovel in his hands. Planting himself in the middle of the left detour, he waved it at them.

"This here road ain't in no condition," he yelled.

Then he removed the detour sign admonishing travelers of the "Washout Ahead."

"Trying to route me out, are you?" MacLellan observed, still holding the revolver in his hand.

Then to Ellen's surprise he pulled trigger, shooting down to his right toward the ground. The bullet, she noticed, went directly through the extra oil can which MacLellan had fastened on the running board.

At the sharp report the workman started forward, thrusting his hand on his hip. The next instant, however, they were shooting over the left road after the Franken car.

But in the rear window the wily eyes were no longer peering at them. Instead it seemed to have opened a little.

Then came a cracking shot whizzing into their radiator. And she knew that the armed guards were responding to MacLellan's shot fired the moment before.

Like a frightened rabbit the girl crouched in her seat, then stole a glance back to see if they were followed from behind.

To her amazement she saw the distant figure of the workman dragging the warning washout sign across the opening of the road over which they were traveling; and in the rapidly increasing distance, she saw the

touring car with the campers draw up and turn sharp to the right down the road the workman had urged them to take.

"That bird's a slick worker," she blurted.

"No foolin'!"

The dangerous calm in his voice confirmed her suspicions that at last they were in the car-snatcher's territory speeding away from all passing cars, alone with the armored Franken riding over a faked detour.

The man seemed lost in brooding as he grimly speeded the car again within range of the Franken's guns. Then he spoke in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible over the hum of the engine:

"Watch for my orders, Ellen, and use the gun when I tell you to!"

ELLEN felt as if she were going to cry. A clammy perspiration broke out over her body. Her nerves strained like taut wires. Frantically she longed for an escape from the hateful suspense and burst out at last:

"Why doesn't somebody do something?"

In front of her MacLellan bent his neck to peer ahead at the Franken.

The two eyes, she saw, were still watching them, both cars moving more and more slowly as the road wound up jagged gullies, over sage and arrow weed and lurched out into an expanse of white sand again.

Then all at once as they rounded a hill of sand drift, Ellen saw the Franken stop. A guard got out of the car and stood looking down at the desolate road below.

MacLellan frowned.

"Watch out for that boxo, Ellen."

Sliding down behind the canvas shield, she wriggled around to watch the road behind, which was holding the guard's attention. Still as death it lay below them shimmering in an eerie heat haze which quivered like a ghostly pall.

Not a creature stirred; not a breath of wind flickered. The dusty highway with its honking horns and passing cars was many miles away.

Then as the guard leaped back into the car the little window in the Franken popped unexpectedly open. MacLellan dodged; yelled to the girl to get under cover.

A whizzing shot hummed through the air. And the next instant, to the girl's horror the man in front of her collapsed in a heap over his steering wheel.

A second report loud and cracking!

Shudders ran down Ellen's spine, but hunching forward in her seat she frantically threw the rear-control into immediate operation, following the Franken as it shot off up a ragged arroya at a sharp left angle.

"They're running away from us! Are you badly hurt?" Ellen cried out to the man.

"Right arm. It'll be O. K. in a minute. Don't mind me. Drive right along."

His voice quivered with pain.

And a choke rose in her throat as she saw him sinking onto the floor in the front seat. He was bleeding. There was spattered blood on the canvas. If he would only let her stop and take care of him!

Pleading, she called down to him: "Please!"

His reply was terse. "Don't let them get away!"

She obediently raced the big car after the disappearing Franken. But to her astonishment, as she approached, the Franken leaped up and zigzagged in the road. She heard a howling from one of the guards, and she cowered back in fear of their fire.

Peering up over the loose canvas cover again, she saw the car still bounding crazily ahead up the steep

arroya with the howling guard bellowing like a frightened cow.

"Well, of all things!"

"What?" begged the man.

"They're afraid of me! Look at 'em go! Poor saps! They think the car's bewitched just because they can't see the driver." Ellen let out an exultant cry: "I'll put the fear of the devil in their hearts!"

And pushing on the gas to its limit she followed on up the grade.

Well ahead of her up the perpendicular hill the Franken spurted. Then all at once it disappeared from view.

ELLEN gained the summit with difficulty, shifting twice before she pulled to a standstill at the top into a whispering grove of cottonwood trees.

"What's the matter?" The man's voice was complaining.

"Your arm's the matter!" she defiantly replied.

"But the Franken—ye gods!"

Obstinately Ellen shook her head.

"We can watch them from here. Look! There it goes just below."

She jumped out as she pointed to the car winding down in a little gully directly below them. Then rapidly she began tearing her skirt into strips as a tourniquet for the man's bleeding arm.

With a groan MacLellan raised himself in his seat, keeping his eyes on the car just below while Ellen bound the strips above and below the wound.

"Straw!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Do you see it ahead of the Franken, down there in the middle of the road? I can't make it out. No trucking over here."

Ellen raised her head from the bandaging and looked down on the Franken. It had reached the bottom of the grade a few hundred feet below them and was turning into a road covered with straw for several hundred yards.

Then MacLellan let out a fierce exclamation. The Franken was plunging ahead on the straw and that very instant dropped several feet into a sudden subterranean depth, leaving only its shiny top and a glimpse of its hood exposed.

"Quicksand," gasped Ellen.

"Sh—sh—sh!" warned the man's whisper. "They'll never get her out now. It's sunk five feet or more. They made a pit there on purpose."

In agitation the girl clung to his side. Below four men masked and armed had sprung out upon the car, covering the guards with their guns and forcing them out one by one to be manacled, tied and gagged.

"Just what I thought!" An ironic gleam flitted in MacLellan's eyes. "I'm sure it's the gang I'm after."

CHAPTER VIII.

"WISH US LUCK!"

TROUBLED with a sudden fear, Ellen looked nervously around.

"You want to be a target too?"

MacLellan raised his left hand toward a thick cluster of cottonwoods.

"Pull up over there."

Quickly and quietly the girl steered the car under the leafy boughs; then, helping the man out, they stood tensely watching the melodrama below.

The highwaymen were separately roping the manacled guards against the trunks of three ironwood trees. Ellen clenched her fists, listening with riveted attention.

But soundlessly they worked below, the gully enclasped in hushed stillness. Only the quail called their blithe notes; and mourning doves in the trees around them cooed an endless hymn of love.

Forcing a flippant voice, the girl demanded: "Where do we go from here?"

"You take the car, Ellen. Back to the highway again."

"And leave you alone?"

But MacLellan seemed not to hear her. His eyes were intently following the men below where two of the bandits stood guard over the captives while the other two rifled the Franken car.

Ellen obtruded herself upon him once more.

"Why did you treat me so badly all morning and—and most of the afternoon?"

A dark flush rose in the man's face. He stood for a quiet moment without stirring. When he spoke his voice was low:

"I wanted you to go home where you belonged, Ellen. I didn't realize the risk until we spotted the Franken. And I knew if I tried to put you out then, you'd be just stubborn enough to stick!"

"So you bullied me instead?"

Ellen's bantering smile faded and a soft look invaded her eyes. She gave MacLellan a sidelong stare and for a sweet moment his tensity relaxed as the shimmering heat haze stole up in mesmeric waves around them, working witchery in their hearts.

"I didn't mean—I'm all wrong—" the man stammered. "I'm sorry, Ellen. I don't know what you think."

"I think you're a darling."

"Why didn't you say so before? Oh, there's so much I want to tell you, but it will take years and years——"

"Do you think——" Ellen's voice faltered as she looked lugubriously into the canyon, "there are—going to be any years ahead?"

"If you'll go back as I tell you to."

"Never!"

The man took her hand.

"When they finish that job down there, we have one chance out of three—my left arm and your right one against the four of them!"

Ellen faced him anxiously.

"I suppose it's a cinch that no one will ever travel over this road with that faked detour sign down there warning them against it?"

MacLellan scowled in reply. Just below two of the masked men had packed the booty from the Franken into a small racing car which they drove out from a thicket of arrow weeds and were preparing to get off, leaving their two accomplices to guard the Franken's victims.

"We'll bluff 'em, Ellen!" the man whispered, jumping back into the car again while the girl took the driver's seat. "On your mark now! A Marathon right after them!"

White and still the girl waited at the wheel. The cottonwood boughs formed a leafy shelter in front of them and a rustling roof over their heads; but on the right they were dangerously exposed to the bandits' fire.

Panicky inside, Ellen peered through the opening. MacLellan wiped his brow. Then, like a thunderclap, the racing car, manned by two robbers, shot up the hill and past them.

INSTANTLY the girl spun MacLellan's car around, forcing it out of the thicket.

Suddenly the man caught her arm.

"They've stopped!" he hissed in her ear, switching off the engine.

Ellen stretched out her head, her eyes wild and eager, her lips parted. Stealthily through the quivering green leaves of the cottonwood trees the masked men were sneaking up on them.

A sound like a snarl escaped Mac-

Lellan's lips and with his left hand he leveled his automatic.

At the sight of it the girl sprang to her feet, threw herself bodily in front of him and screamed in a thrilling voice: "Don't you dare shoot us!"

The next minute she stared down the barrels of the bandits' revolvers. She was still sprawled across MacLellan's knees, her torn skirt hiding his Colt from the lynx-eyed thugs and her shoulder concealing the tourniquet on his wounded arm and his head.

"What the — blankety — blank — blank?" blared the bandits in foul invective. "What the devil are you two doing here?"

RIGIDLY, Ellen nestled her head on MacLellan's shoulder, casting a flirtatious glance at the two loaded guns which were leveled directly at her turned-up nose. Her disordered hair concealed most of his face.

"Can you keep a secret?"

The men's jaw's dropped.

"We're eloping," she suddenly confided. "But you mustn't tell a soul! Now give us your word of honor."

She broke off as MacLellan, at the word *honor*, convulsively shifted his knees.

In a secret sign language she saw that the masked men were holding a conference; and a minute later she realized that only one revolver was poked under her nose. The other was going back with its owner to their small racing car after pinions and gags "to bind us," she told herself, "like the poor guards below."

And tremblingly Ellen waited, her face growing so pale that watching her as she sat there brave and rigid on his knees MacLellan thought she would faint in his arms. Then her cheeks flamed out crimson and the swift rush of blood set up a dancing dizziness in her brain.

From far off in the hazy hot air a roaring noise was coming and for a delirious minute Ellen thought the rumbling was in her head.

But the reality of it burst bewilderingly upon her when she saw the revolver under her nose waver for an instantaneous interval as the thug involuntarily turned his head toward the detour road where a car from the highway was rapidly approaching.

At the same moment from under her arm came a shocking report. MacLellan's Colt had shot the bandit through the head and he dropped on the ground, his face smeared with gore.

At the crack of the exploding bullet and the snorting crescendo of the car ascending from the faked detour, the second thug bounded into his racer, turned it giddily around and plunged incautiously back into the gully again. As he shot past, MacLellan fired (again with his left hand).

"Right after him!" he yelled, forcing Ellen into her seat at the wheel again.

But at the sight of the dead man's blood the girl's gorge had risen so that she could hardly stir. An intolerable distaste sent black spots before her eyes.

Mechanically she followed orders, starting the car forward in a violent attempt to pull out of the cottonwoods and onto the road, when suddenly in her blind nausea she sent the big machine crashing straight into a tree.

At once MacLellan jumped out, sniffing the air like a hound.

HAVING ducked his bullets, he saw the desperado below hurtle his racer back into hiding in the thicket of arrow weeds, his accomplices leaping headlong after him.

At the same moment the roaring

car from the highway came skyrocketing up beside them. And in a glance Ellen recognized Detective Snook, his pop-eyed partner and the four men in the back seat.

With monosyllabic abruptness MacLellan accosted the detective. But in their brief, excited conversation Ellen caught only savage epithets. The next instant MacLellan leaped onto the running board of the detective's car, holding on with his left arm, and they raced down into the gully below, leaving Ellen all alone on the hill.

Desperately fighting for control over the queer faintness clouding over her, the girl held her hands to her ears, waiting with a beating heart while two shots reechoed from below.

Then as she watched, fascinated with fright, she saw the thugs forced out from the thicket (one wounded in the shoulder; another in the leg) and throw up their hands in surrender as the seven men closed in upon them.

And with a quiet sigh Ellen fainted in her seat.

WHEN she opened her eyes a little man was lifting her out of the car, petting her head as if she were a two-year-old and gently smoothing down her hair. The other men were shaking MacLellan's left hand and offering congratulations.

Then at last the blur cleared away and she recognized in the fatherly man fussing over her the sharp features of Detective Snook. He sat furiously fanning her with his hat while his pop-eyed partner examined MacLellan's wounded arm.

"I didn't get that wire from the big boss in New York until you left Hacienda today," Snook was saying. "And ever since then we've been trying to catch up to you."

Weakly Ellen broke in:

"But how did you ever find us?"

Snook's sharp face lighted. "As a matter of fact we lost you along that detour, but when we covered it a second time, I saw oil on the ground at the faked washout sign. It was fresh oil and I figured that a car had been along."

Ellen met MacLellan's eyes.

"You did it on purpose?"

His face shone on her luminously and she flushed as she caught an adoring look in his eyes.

"At least you might tell me if you're really a detective?"

"I'll give bond he's a real detective. He's the only man that could have caught that crowd. You know that the man you shot was the man you were after, don't you?" queried Snook.

"Yes. I would have preferred to get him alive so that he could clear me of the accusations which made me leave California. But I was afraid Ellen was in danger."

"Don't worry about being cleared, boy. You are right in line now for promotion and high honors beside the large rewards attached to that worthless corpse over there. When you come back to California from the main office in New York, you'll probably come back as boss of this branch. And I, for one, will be glad of it."

"By rights all the honor goes to the future Mrs. MacLellan."

Ellen smiled in reply. Then she put out her hand and touched him, saying softly, "And you're not mad any more?"

Impulsively he kissed her lips.

"Just madly in love!"

Designing Accidents

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

A WEST wind traveling fitfully over the countless rabbit holes on Martinhoe Common brought little whiffs of a familiar and entrancing odor to Flip's twitching nostrils. She opened one eye and then the other, rose from her seat in the Ford car which was grinding its way up a steep ascent, and with her forepaws upon the side looked longingly out.

Grant, having completed the ascent, brought the car to a standstill by the side of the road and drew a packet of letters which he had just collected at the village post office from his pocket. He opened the door of the car.

"Go and enjoy yourself, Flip," he enjoined. "We will rest for quarter of an hour."

Flip, a quivering, fat ball of excitement, leaped into the road and darted toward the arena of the most elusive sport which ever brought joy to the heart of a Sealyham.

Grant read his letters one by one and stuffed them into his pocket. The last, enc'osed in a heavy cream envelope with the black initials 'S. Y.' on the back, he opened with more interest than the others. It was from his Chief, a few lines short but to the point:

MY DEAR GRANT:

Glad to hear you are getting so much amusement out of your holiday. Without the least desire to interfere in any way with your artistic efforts, I should like to suggest that if you pass through the small market town of Bodstaple you call and see the local sergeant there.

It appears that a number of quite inexplicable accidents have taken place in the vicinity for which the local police are absolutely unable to account. Faulkener, the Chief Constable of the County, whom I think you know, has been over from Exeter and I understand that if they don't come to some conclusion shortly they are going to appeal to us.

I'm not asking you to take this on professionally in any way, but I thought it might amuse you to study the matter if you should be in the neighborhood.

Grant replaced the letter in its envelope and buttoned it up in his breast coat pocket. Afterward he studied the map for a moment, filled his pipe and leaned back to enjoy the soft summer sunshine.

The place brought reminiscences of odors other than that which had moved Flip to ecstasy; suggestions of wild thyme, the faint almond-like scent of the gorse, an occasional waft of sweetness from the drooping honeysuckle in a clump of bushes a short distance away.

It was a morning for lazy and sensuous idleness, a morning when even to have taken out his easel would have seemed too hard a task. Grant leaned back in his car with his hands clasped behind his head and gave himself up to most unprofessional meditation.

The most adroit criminal in the

world would have found it difficult to awaken him from his lethargy at that moment. The sport of man-hunting had lost its appeal. What a country this to end one's days in, if only the sun would shine more often!

A sharp bark in the road brought him back to the present. He looked over the side of the car. Flip, the most disreputable specimen of canine existence the mind of man could conceive, climbed onto the step and waited for the door to open.

Each one of her short legs was caked in soil. Her stomach was black from investigations in a peat bog. Her nose and mouth, up to her eyes, were indistinguishable. She wagged her tail a little self-consciously and jumped up to her place.

"Into the next pond you go, old lady," Grant muttered—a threat which left her entirely unmoved.

THEY jogged on through the picturesque country, master and dog, until they reached the pleasant, straggling village of Bodstaple, a village which seemed to extend the whole length of one side of a steep combe.

There was a trout stream down below, winding its way through a strip of rich green meadowland, and above one clean white street, widening to a little square around which were the principal houses and shops.

Grant drew up at the homely looking inn, ordered lunch and strolled over to the police station opposite, a flower-covered abode with irregular blocks of white pavement leading through a garden riotous in color.

Sergeant Elworthy was at home and apparently off duty. He wore his official trousers, a gray shirt, and very little else.

"I am on a holiday," Grant explained, after he had presented his card, "and I don't wish to interfere unless I can be of service. The Chief, however, has written me from Scotland Yard that you are rather troubled about some accidents here. He doesn't give me any particulars. I don't know whether you would care to confide in me."

The sergeant, a large and ponderous man, examined the card, holding it between his thumb and forefinger. He spelled the name out to himself.

"Grant," he reflected. "It was an Inspector Grant took the big reward from America."

"I was the lucky person," his visitor confessed.

The sergeant looked reverently across at him.

"You're mighty welcome, Mr. Grant," he said. "It may seem a small affair this to a brain like yours, but it do get us local people fairly flummoxed."

"Tell me about it," Grant invited, filling his pipe and passing his pouch across.

The sergeant was a very deliberate man and it took him five minutes to follow his companion's example and get started.

Grant was careful not to hurry him. He had developed a theory that you got the most out of people by permitting them to use their own methods.

"It begun four months ago," the sergeant explained, "with young Ned Spurrell, the Squire's underkeeper, a harmless enough young fellow, though he do be fond of a drop of cider.

"He were walking through the wood late one night on his beat when he had the sudden feeling, to use his own words, that 'summat was biting into his flesh.'

"He went toppling over and when he came to an hour or so later there was a wound in his leg that ain't healed yet."

"What sort of a wound?" Grant asked curiously.

"A nasty, jagged place as though someone had hit him with an iron implement. He's been on his back for six weeks, and powerful sorry for himself he be. Then, while he do lie there, pretty well the same thing happens to John Strone.

"He be a farm laborer up to the Hall Farm, and he were walking home from the inn one night, a trifle merry but nothing to hurt; and he suddenly felt that something had gripped him by the leg. Over he toppled, and when he come to his trousers were all torn and he were in pretty much in the same state as Ned.

What do you make of that, Mr. Grant?"

Grant shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't make anything out of it yet," he admitted. "I should like to hear the doctor's account of the wound."

"That you may have at any moment," the sergeant replied, "for Doctor Graves he do live in the village, and he'll be home from the rounds before one. A fair puzzled man the doctor, too.

"After Strone there did come a youngster what hadn't been in these parts long—Michael Kerrison, a loose-living lad, I'm afraid. He were on his way—some ways to do a bit of poaching—one dark night, and all of a sudden he felt a bang on the back of his head as though he had been hit by a great piece of board, and over he went. He never heerd a footstep or see'd a soul. It were just as though a ton of wood had fallen from the skies and knocked him silly.

"Last of all, a fortnight ago come Thursday, Mr. Emmett, the grocer, was out after an evening rabbit, on Farmer Jobson's meadow, where he'd a perfect right to be and, crossing the stepping-stones, the same thing happened to him as had happened to Strone and Kerrison and Spurrell.

"When he come to he'd the same nature wound in his leg; but he was lying on the bank and he will have it that someone had pulled him out fearing like that he might be drowned, and left him there."

"None of these men were robbed or interfered with in any way?" Grant asked.

"Not a thing touched. Most of 'em had money in their pockets and there it was. Mr. Emmett, he'd twenty-five dollars in treasury notes and some loose silver. It was there to the last penny."

"They were all of different families? Nothing to connect them at all?"

"Not a thing. The lad was almost a stranger to the others. Spurrell and Strone were just friendly-like, but not intimate."

"Any bad characters in the village?"

"There isn't a living soul," was the emphatic reply, "as one'd suspect of a dirty deed. There's little trouble here for the police and less now than ever since the Welsh Revivalists came along. They do seem in their way to have done a power of good, although not saying that such was necessary in these parts. We bean't such sinful folks as in the towns."

"Have you any theories?"

"There isn't one a sane man could keep in his head," the sergeant declared.

"Suspect anyone?"

"There bean't a soul in the place one could suspect."

"No strangers about?"

"Not a sign of one."

GRANT rose to his feet.

"Well, no wonder you're puzzled, sergeant," he said. "I'll have a talk with the doctor during the afternoon,

and maybe one of the men who met with the accident. When do you go on duty again?"

"At ten o'clock tonight, sir," the man replied. "There's nought but simple jobs in the daytime here. I've taken to prowl about in the darkness on the chance of finding something."

"I'll be in before then," Grant promised, and took his leave.

He visited the doctor after an excellent luncheon — a cheerful old gentleman who had absolutely no enlightenment to offer.

"All I can tell you," he confided, "is that each of these three men met with his accident or whatever it was in about the same place, halfway up the shin bone. It just looks as though someone had struck them a savage blow with a jagged metal weapon of some sort, ripped the flesh up and just bared the bone. As for Kerrison, what he got was plain enough. He got a bang on the back of the head with a blunt weapon of considerable breadth. A plank of wood would give you the idea."

"It seems an extraordinary business," Grant observed.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He was a very hard-worked man and his manner indicated that it was his business to heal wounds and not to worry about how they were received.

He made no attempt to detain his visitor when the latter rose to take his leave, and hastened off to his consulting-room. Grant put his head in at the police station.

"I shall stay the night, anyway, sergeant," he confided, "perhaps two or three days. Which is the most intelligent of the men who met with an accident to his leg?"

"Ned Spurrell, he do be the most of a scholard," the policeman conceded. "I'll walk with you so far any time this afternoon."

"About four, then," Grant suggested.

GRANT, as he pushed open the gate of Ned Spurrell's cottage, paused upon the red tiled path between two great bushes of sweetbriar and listened.

The casement window of the room on the ground floor was wide open and through it there floated the sound of the most beautiful voice it seemed to him that he had ever heard in his life—the voice of a woman reading a chapter from one of the Gospels. Even as he lingered, the cadence of it died away.

He heard the closing of the book, a momentary silence, and then her voice again, reciting the Lord's Prayer, to which there came in an undertone a half-shamed, half-earnest echo. He waited until the last words had left their lips before he knocked at the door.

A moment or so later it was opened. A girl, wearing a perfectly plain gray dress, made with the severity of a uniform, her hair brushed smoothly back from her beautiful forehead, stood looking out at him. He knew at once that it was the woman with the wonderful voice.

He realized, too, that, notwithstanding the simplicity of her attire and slight pallor of complexion, she was probably the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. Her complexion was almost unnaturally clear, her features Madonna-like in their purity, her faint smile, even to him, a stranger, the gentlest and sweetest thing in the world.

"I called to see Mr. Spurrell," he explained. "You are probably the nurse. Is he well enough to talk to me?"

"Quite well enough," she answered. "I am not the nurse, but they have left me in charge for a little time. Shall I tell him your name?"

"He wouldn't know it," Grant replied. "All the same I should be glad to see him for a minute or two."

She led the way in and bent over the couch.

"Here is a gentleman to see you," she announced. "Your mother will be back now in a quarter of an hour. I shall leave you with him."

"You'll come tomorrow," the young man begged.

"I shall come tomorrow," she acquiesced, almost under her breath. "I shall come every day until you promise."

His eyes followed her to the door, which Grant held open for her. She looked around and smiled.

"May God have you in His keeping," she said as she passed out.

Grant closed the door and came over to the bed.

"So, you're Ned Spurrell," he began, drawing a chair up to the man's side. "I wish you'd tell me who that very attractive young person is?"

"Her name is Mary Tennent," was the somewhat diffident reply. "She and her brother are after mission work roundabout here. They've come from Wales."

"I should think all you unmarried lads would easily get converted," Grant remarked, smiling.

THE young man declined to take the matter lightly.

"She is marvelous," he confided in an awed tone. "The way she talks about religion, too! There was never a parson like it for making you feel things. Who might you be, sir,"

"I came to see you about the accident," Grant explained. "Queer sort of affair, wasn't it?"

"Are you from the Insurance?" Ned Spurrell asked suspiciously.

"If you really want to know," Grant answered, "although I'd rather you didn't talk about me, I am connected with the police."

The invalid chuckled.

"Connected with the police!" he scoffed. "They be a pretty lot. Four on us done in like this and not even an arrest."

"Well, it's rather an unusual sort of an affair?" Grant pointed out. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"Why, it happened—that's all. I was walking straight along, harmless as might be, smoking my pipe, and it was just as though summat had hit me an almighty whack on the right shin with a crowbar. I toppled right over, couldn't move or drag my leg an inch, and before I knowed where I was I were a gone 'un."

"You didn't hear anyone round?"

"I didn't hear anyone, and there wurn't anyone. I'd go bail for that," was the dogged reply. "A most mysterious-like business, though, it was. I've lain here and puzzled about it until my head ached."

"Have you told anyone the exact spot where it happened?"

"The sergeant knows to an inch. There ain't anything there to harm a body, leastways so he says. He's been there often enough since."

"I'll get him to show me the place," Grant said. "No one about here with any grudge against you, I suppose, or anything of that sort?"

"Not a soul. Besides, there's the others," the young man pointed out. "There isn't a more popular young chap in the village than John Strone. Shall you be going to see him?"

"Presently. I want to see all four of you who have met with these singular accidents."

"I don't know as it will do you any good," the gamekeeper warned him. "They none of them knows any more about it than I do."

"In our profession," Grant observed, "one stumbles upon a clue in the most unexpected moments."

"You be a detective, I suppose?"

Grant nodded.

"Yes," he admitted, "I belong to

Scotland Yard. Just now I'm having a holiday."

"Tell us some stories about burglaring and such-like," the young man proposed. "It's dull lying here now she's paid me her visit."

"Does this young lady revivalist visit all of you?" Grant asked.

"I reckon so," was the somewhat sullen reply. "She went to see Strone twice one day when he were bad."

"What sect does she belong to?

"None at all. That's the wonderful part of her and her brother, too. If you're church, she just wants you to feel something inside about church that you've never felt before. She tries to 'light' something, she says. If you're chapel it's just the same. I'm going to church with her the first day I can hobble out."

GRANT, after the recital of a few personal experiences, presently found the place where he had left the sergeant to wait for him and examined the scene of Spurrell's accident.

It was just a rough path, a little overgrown with bracken; and the closest investigation yielded not the slightest explanation of the mystery.

"You'd like to see the other misfortunate young man, Mr. Grant?" the sergeant suggested. "They're none of them so far away."

"I'll see them tomorrow," Grant promised. "Don't let me keep you, sergeant. I'm going to smoke a pipe here at the edge of the wood. If you'll call for me when you make your rounds tonight I might have a stroll with you."

The man saluted and withdrew. Grant seated himself on a low bank and awaited Flip's pleasure. Presently, he heard a gate opened and closed.

Coming across the strip of meadowland toward him was Mary Tennent. He watched her approach with critical but admiring eyes. She walked, it seemed to him, as he had never seen another woman walk in his life, and her smile as she recognized him was a bewildering thing.

"You have come to see the place where Mr. Spurrell met with his accident?" she inquired.

He nodded.

"And you?" he ventured. "Have been to see one of the other sufferers?"

She smiled.

"I am very happy this afternoon," she confided. "Mr. Strone has been so obstinate. Just now I think the words of a little prayer I said moved him. He has promised to go to chapel with me the first Sunday he is able to get out."

"You'll have your hands full with all these young men," he remarked.

"What do I mind?" she rejoined. "It is my life. It is what I was born for; what I live for. Now, the only one who hasn't promised is Michael Kerrison. He is difficult, but he will promise before I go."

"What made you take up this work?" he asked.

"God put it into my head," she answered simply. "My father preached until the day he died. My brother is something wonderful. I do my best. There are times when I am very successful."

"Don't you find these young men get jealous of one another sometimes?"

She smiled back at him frankly.

"Of course now and then they are foolish," she admitted. "They don't understand of how little account love-making and marrying and those things are compared with eternity. I'd give my poor body to all of them if I could make them feel the great things."

He looked at her curiously. There was no doubt as to her sincerity.

The light of a divine mysticism shone from her eyes. One could imagine her a Joan of Arc, welcoming, exulting in sacrifice. Her body—what did it matter? She lived outside.

"Who is with you here?" he inquired a little abruptly. "Didn't I hear something about a brother?"

"I am alone with my brother," she told him. "We have a little caravan. We came all the way from Wales in it. He is a very clever carpenter and tinker, and sometimes I do sewing at ladies' houses. We have no money except what we make by the way, but that is always plenty."

"Do you know," he asked her, "that you are very beautiful?"

"It is the grace of God which is in me," she said quite simply.

His breath was a little taken away. He knew perfectly well that she was sincere, that every word she said came from her heart.

"Still I can't help thinking that you must find it more than a little troublesome sometimes with all these young men," he persisted. "Don't some of them want to marry you, for instance?"

She laughed softly.

"Most of them," she admitted. "I would marry them all, if I could. I would marry anyone to save his soul."

"Even me?"

SHE laid her hand upon his without a moment's hesitation—a soft, cool hand, delightful to feel.

"Of course I would," she assured him. "If by marrying you I could make you see the light, could take you up with me to God, of course I would marry you."

"But then," he went on, still holding her hand, "there are Ned Spurrell and Michael Kerrison and John Strone."

"I know," she assented a little sadly. "I shall take them all to church or chapel with me, and they will all want me to marry them. Sometimes, when I go away they are angry and they forget all they have promised; but not always. Many of them remember, and if only a few remember it is worth while. What about you? Please tell me your name again."

"Grant—Erneson Grant."

"What about you, Mr. Grant?"

"I don't think I'm irreligious," he said. "I am just one of those people who can't arrive at any satisfactory solution, I suppose, and who drift."

"It is the most dangerous state of all," she declared, gripping his fingers. "You try, don't you, to solve the future and to understand God with your brain. Men can't do that. It's faith you want—faith. Faith you must have.

"You must get it at any price. You must pray for it; pray until the words fail you; but you must have it, or think what will happen when you die."

Her voice was quivering with eagerness; the fever was upon her.

"I must come and hear your brother preach," he suggested.

"You shall talk with him," she agreed. "He is wonderful. He has made more converts than anyone else. Come and find him now. I will show you where we live."

He rose to his feet and whistled for Flip, who had been engaged upon disappointing investigations around some rabbit holes. The girl took his arm quite naturally.

"I should love you to be one of my brothers," she confided, "my brothers in the Great Faith. If anyone can make you see the truth, James can. He has the gift of tongues."

"You too have a gift," he reminded her.

"The gift of Mary Magdalen," she sighed. "She also was beautiful. My beauty, such as it is, is for anyone

whom it can bring a little nearer to salvation."

THEY came out from the wood into a meadow by the stream. Two small caravans were drawn up a few yards from the gate. From inside the smaller one came the sound of the whirring of a lathe.

"That is my brother at work," she told him. "James!"

The door presently opened and a young man appeared. Grant studied him appraisingly, a typical visionary, hollow-cheeked, with cavernous eyes, jet black hair, lips moving even in silence.

"Who is this, Mary?" he asked.

"A friend," she answered. "I found him at Ned Spurrell's cottage. He is coming to the meeting tonight. He is still of the Kingdom of the World, James. You will speak to him."

Grant, the least impressionable of men, felt the warmth of the young man's smile, the earnestness of his gaze.

"If words winged with the truth can bring you to the knowledge of it, you shall hear them," he promised.

He locked the door of the little caravan from which he had issued.

"Is that your workshop?" Grant inquired.

The young man nodded, but ignored his questioner's obvious curiosity. He made his way to the larger caravan and busied himself at a bookcase selecting various volumes. The girl brought her companion to the steps and invited him to enter.

"There is my bed," she pointed out, inclining her head toward a spotlessly neat bunk, by the side of which on a small table stood a bowl of flowers and a Bible. From the opened window a soft breeze swept through the place.

"You have chosen a delightful spot for your camping ground," Grant remarked.

"At night it is wonderful," she confided. "I lie here and I can see the stars and I can hear the night birds in the woods. There is an owl's nest in those trees there, and a nightingale just across the stream. Sometimes it is too beautiful to sleep, though. Then I get up and walk around."

"It must have been close here that Ned Spurrell met with his accident," Grant reflected. "You didn't hear him call out or anything?"

"We heard nothing," the girl answered.

Grant took his leave and she walked with him to the top of the field.

"At eight o'clock in the Square," she reminded him.

"I shall be there," he promised.

"I shall pray for you," she whispered. "I think I shall pray as I never prayed before."

She was clinging to his arm quite frankly and Grant, with all his experience of men and women, was confused, bewildered by her attitude.

If she were indeed unconscious of any physical self, she still seemed to retain a most desirable leaven of humanity. One could almost have sworn to a glint of coquetry in her eyes as she bade him farewell and watched him march off down the road.

He turned to wave his hand, and he wondered whether it was his fancy that her fingers touched her lips before they waved their reply.

"Any luck, sir?" the sergeant asked him, as they met in the street.

Grant shook his head.

"I think your little corner of the world, sergeant," he replied "is going to set us all guessing."

AFTER dinner he lit a pipe and strolled out to witness what was almost a royal procession, the proces-

sion of Mary Tennent with a hymn-book in her hand and her brother with a Bible, passing down the village street. People whom they met clasped both of them by the hand. Before they reached the market place they were the centre of a little escorting group.

People streamed from all sides. Willing hands brought out a rudely improvised platform. The girl looked everywhere until she discovered Grant on the outskirts of the crowd. She left her place, walked up to him and took him by the hand.

"Please come nearer," she begged. "You must hear everything."

He suffered himself to be led to the edge of the platform. Almost immediately afterward the man and the girl dropped onto their knees. Everyone in the congregation covered his eyes. The man prayed.

Many times afterward in life Grant tried to reconstruct that little scene; to recollect the almost magical impression of that torrent of passionate words.

The old-fashioned market square became an oasis fenced in from the rest of the world. The footsteps of a few passers-by shuffled along the pavements.

Now and then a motor-car with shrill clanging of horn was driven down the cobbled street. One noisy company of callow youths went by, shouting and laughing, but all these sounds seemed to come only as indistinct echoes from a smaller world. All his old ideas, the ideas of the cultivated man, of the flamboyant vulgarity of revivalist eloquence left Grant forever as he stood entranced.

The man with the sobbing voice and the convulsively twitching features was inspired if ever a man was inspired; and the girl who stood by his side, her hands clasped lightly in front of her, her eyes wandering only from her brother's to his, seemed as though she were the dumb but passionate duetist of his pleading.

Grant never hesitated to admit in later years the sweeping down in those few minutes of all those barriers of cold agnosticism which the brain builds against unreasoned truths. This man had found something the world lacked.

Grant himself trod the paths of exaltation with that strange little crowd —the crowd of servant girls, shop assistants, a laborer or two from the road, a tired tradesman, a waggoner, a sprinkling of market women.

It was a relief when the voice ceased and the man fell on his knees. The girl's lips moved as she prayed and her eyes never left his. They were appealing to him, spiritually, humanly, wonderfully. Then it was all over.

There was a moment's deep silence. Brother and sister stepped down, shaking hands with nearly every member of the congregation. Then they came over to Grant.

"Will you walk with us?" the girl invited.

"Only as far as the door of my inn," he answered. "You must forgive me tonight."

She clung to his arm. The man strode on a pace or two away, muttering to himself. Somehow, Grant fancied that he was still praying.

"You began to feel," she pleaded. "I saw it in your face. Oh, don't think that I am ignorant. I am not. I can imagine the world in which you live. I know that in a moment even God speaking through man cannot work a miracle. But you will come. You will come to us. You will not go away before we have talked again?"

"I promise," he answered.

"Tonight," she went on, "I shall pray for you. I shall pray with you. If you are sleepless come tonight. I shall wait for you."

"Very well," he assented, "I shall come."

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Erneson Grant started out with Flip in close attendance. In his hand he carried a thick stick, and he walked all the time with unusually hesitating footsteps.

At the entrance to the little wood he paused. Through the trees he could see a single light burning in the caravan. He walked more slowly than ever now, his stick outstretched in front of him, Flip running from side to side.

When he reached the last fifty yards he came once more to a standstill. There was brushwood upon the path which he had not noticed during the afternoon. He took a careful step forward. Suddenly, Flip growled and he realized that the end of his search was at hand.

He knocked the loose twigs away with his stick and found what he had expected. He took it up—the innocent-looking branch of an oak tree, unstripped even of its leaves, with cruel jagged-edged knives buried under the bracken on either side of the moss where the foot was meant to fall.

He held the diabolical-looking implement gingerly in his hand. Then he walked on to the caravan. As he passed through the gate he saw the girl waiting and listening, and it seemed to him that she had turned to marble.

He threw his burden upon the ground and looked at her without speech. The door of the smaller caravan opened and her brother came silently out.

"For me!" Grant cried, with an undernote of fierceness in his tone.

She held out her hands to him. He would have brushed them away, but he had lost the power. They stole up to his shoulders. She was almost as tall as he and her face, upturned, was close to his.

"It is the only way," she sobbed out. "Those others—I pleaded with them when they were strong and healthy, and God meant nothing to them. It is only in sickness and suffering that you can reach their hearts. We have found that all our days, James and I.

"These three young men who have suffered, through their sufferings they have become God's children; you too. Tonight it was the beginning, but you would have wandered away; you would have thought all that had happened was just a wave of feeling. You would have gone, as now you will go. I wanted to keep you so much—more than any of the others."

He looked at the wicked-looking device on the ground and still he found speech difficult.

"I am a detective," he said at last. "I was sent here to discover the secret of these accidents."

"And now that you have discovered?" she asked, without loosening her clasped fingers.

He shivered from head to foot—a strong man, a captor of murderers, the man who had faced death as often as any soldier.

"Show me the inside of your caravan," he directed, turning away from her. "The small one."

The man unlocked it, and as he looked around Grant's expression hardened. He stepped back and closed the door. The eyes of brother and sister followed him.

"You have a stove there," he pointed out. "Bring it to me."

The man obeyed. Grant lit it and placed it underneath the smaller caravan. They collected brushwood sadly. Soon there was a blaze. In the end there was nothing left but fragments of metal. The smoke was high over the trees. Grant listened.

"In a few minutes," he said," the people from the village will come. Tell your story as you will."

The girl clung to him. Her brother looked on with unseeing eyes.

"Don't go!" she sobbed. "You must stay."

There followed an epoch of madness in a well-constructed, logical life!

HALF an hour later, Erneson Grant, with Flip by his side, sat in the Ford car in front of the village inn. The sergeant stood upon the pavement to attend his departure.

"I've decided to travel on by moonlight," the former explained. "Listen, Elworthy, there will be no more accidents."

"You have discovered summat?" the man demanded eagerly.

"Nothing definite," Grant replied evasively. "If anything further of the same sort should happen, I'll make a report in London. My impression, however, is that there will be no more accidents."

"Which way are you going tonight, sir?" the sergeant inquired. "It's a queer time to start away."

Grant turned the Ford round so that his back was toward the lights on the hill and the meadow where the caravan was standing. He thrust in his gears and touched the accelerator.

"I'm going as far as I can in this direction before daylight," he answered.

Specimens for Exhibition

If we are to believe the reports of early travelers and the drawings upon ancient maps the earth was in distant parts peopled with tribes more like demons or the elementals of the occult than contestants for beauty prizes.

There were one-eyed races; tribes without mouths, who supported life by smell alone; those with ears so enormous that they could be used for tents, cloaks and sleeping rugs; headless beings with mouth and eyes set in their breasts, one tribe of which was reported in all sincerity by Sir Walter Raleigh as dwelling inland in Guiana.

There were men who looked as if sliced in half from head to foot, with but one eye, arm and leg; men who could at will separate at the waist, the upper half turning into a vampire creature with wings.

There were Eskimo men so small they could be carried in the sealskin hoods of their normal-sized spouses; men eight feet high, slender and writhing as serpents; one-legged people who leaped astounding distances and protected themselves from heat by lying under the shade of their elevated enormous foot; hairy men with no joints to their limbs; gentlemen with huge holes in their chests through which bearers thrust a long pole and carried their masters; satyrs with horns, pointed ears and goat legs; horrible disembodied heads which rolled; a whole creation misshapen by distorted report and a fertile imagination.

Reading about these, the owner of a Coney Island freak show must utter loud moans of despairing regret that he cannot secure specimens for exhibition.

The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

AS RELATED BY

DAVID WARFIELD

to

BIDE DUDLEY

"YES, I have a mystery. Perhaps if you publish it a solution may be found." David Warfield, than whom there is no greater actor alive, made the foregoing statement. Mr. Warfield has retired from the stage temporarily, at least, "to take things easy a while."

As he spoke he settled back in his chair at the Lambs Club and indulged in a long pull at his cigar. He was in a reflective mood, so I waited in silence.

"Since 'The Music Master' came into being," he continued, "I have had one big ambition."

"To find another rôle like Anton Von Barwig," I suggested.

"No—not that! My great desire has been to see Anton Von Barwig acted as I have played him several thousand times. In other words, I want to see my character, the one that is really a part of me, acted true to the type I made him.

"The complete realization of my desire would be impossible, of course, since no two people are exactly alike, and I, like everybody else, have points of personality and acting ideas no one else has or could have.

"But I'd like to see Anton Von Barwig done as nearly as possible my way, and I want the actor to make up to look exactly like me in character. That part is possible."

"Have you never seen anyone play the rôle?" I asked.

"No one but me has ever acted it. I have never permitted it. In all my seasons in 'The Music Master' Anton Von Barwig was Warfield, and not even an understudy was allowed to act him.

"In the few instances when, for one reason or another, I was incapacitated, the performances were called off. The management insisted the people came to see Warfield as Von Barwig; hence no one but Warfield should be Anton Von Barwig."

"But what about stock presentations?"

"The play never has been released for stock. Some day it will be, of course, and some day it will be in films. But I shall not be in the picture as Von Barwig."

"But as to the mystery?"

"Yes, I'm coming to that. It concerns my desire to see the rôle played my way. I nursed that yearning all through my Von Barwig days. When the play was revived at the Knickerbocker Theatre several years ago I thought I was going to have my wish.

"It was after we had been at the Knickerbocker about two weeks. One Saturday afternoon I appeared at the stage door and the doorman looked at me as though he were crazy.

"'What's wrong?' I asked.

"'Is it really you, Mr. Warfield?' he asked, in a tone made halting by suppressed excitement.

"'Of course it is,' I replied.

"'But—but you were in there.' He pointed toward the stage. 'I saw you a minute ago, in your make-up.'

"I laughed. 'What have you been drinking?' I asked. 'I haven't been in there since 11:45 o'clock last night. You're a great joker.'

"'I'm not a drinking man, nor am I joking, Mr. Warfield,' he blurted. 'If I didn't see you in make-up on that stage three minutes ago I'm going to see a doctor.'

"Again I laughed. 'All right!' I replied. 'See a good one!' And then I went to my dressing-room.

"Just outside my door I met a member of the company. 'What did you take it off for?' he asked.

"Take what off?' I queried.

"'Your make-up.'

"'I haven't had it on yet.'

"'I just saw you in make-up.'

"I became convinced there was a plan on foot to have some fun with me. I passed into my room without further comment. Fifteen minutes later the doorman approached the stage manager.

"'Is Mr. Warfield coming back in time for the show?' he asked.

"'He is in his dressing-room, isn't he?' asked the stage manager.

"'No, sir! He just went out the stage door, and in make-up, too.'

"IMMEDIATELY the stage manager became excited. He knew I wouldn't do such a thing unless there was something radically wrong. Rushing out on the sidewalk he looked up and down the street. No Warfield was to be seen in make-up or otherwise. As he came back onto the stage I stepped from my dressing-room, ready to go on.

"'Oh, there you are!' sang out the stage manager.

"'Surely I'm here!' I replied.

"'But I just saw you go through the stage door onto the sidewalk,' protested the doorman.

"'Not I!' I returned. And that ended the argument for the time being.

"From that moment on, however, there was an air of mystery backstage. The doorman and the actor I spoke of wondered if I were playing a trick on them. They insisted that if I weren't tricking them I had a double and that he had been backstage in the Anton Von Barwig make-up.

"However, in a week the matter apparently was forgotten. Then it bobbed up again. A man employed in the front of the house came back to the stage and sought out the stage manager.

"'Isn't Mr. Warfield going on today?' he asked.

"'Of course he is,' responded the stage manager. 'If he doesn't there wont be any show.'

"'But I just saw him go through the front door in make-up and an usher seated him in the front row.'

"The stage manager laughed. "You ought to take something for that,' he replied. 'Mr. Warfield is in his dressing-room now just starting to make up. Go and see for yourself.'

"The other fellow was not convinced. He knocked at my door and I invited him in. I was in street clothes. He looked greatly surprised.

"'Oh!' he stammered. 'I — I thought may be you weren't well today and—and I wondered if you were going to appear.'

"With that he closed the door and left in a hurry.

"It was that day I came near realizing my ambition—that is, came near arranging to realize it. When I made my first entrance I was astonished to see, seated in the front row, a man in the exact make-up of Anton Von Barwig.

"It seemed to me I was looking at a twin Warfield. At first the sight disconcerted me; then I pulled myself together and went on with my part, keeping the other Von Barwig in a corner of my eye.

"I thought I detected him repeating every line with me and, so far as he could without attracting undue attention, he acted with me. When I came off I called the stage manager and told him what I had seen.

"'Catch that fellow after the performance and bring him back to see me,' I ordered. 'Don't fail!'

"The stage manager and an assistant were at the door when the man came out. They buttonholed him and invited him to visit me in my dressing-room.

"Had he declined they were prepared to use force, but no such action was necessary. He seemed flattered.

"Smilingly he accepted and, in a brief space of time, he stood before me. I offered my hand and he grasped it eagerly.

"'I noticed your make-up as I played,' I said, 'and was eager to meet a man who could pay so much attention to detail. I want to compliment you on copying my Anton Von Barwig in appearance almost exactly. But what is your idea in doing so?'

"His delight was marked. 'I have seen you play the rôle eighteen times,' he replied. 'It is my favorite diversion. I guess I am a crank on the subject of Warfield's Von Barwig. It has been a satisfying experiment for me to copy the make-up and act the part at home.'

"'Were you ever in this theatre before made up as you are?' I asked.

"'I was,' he replied readily. 'It was a week or ten days ago. I thought I'd like to see if I could fool anybody in your company with my Von Barwig make-up. So I came here and managed to make my way to the stage.

"'I meant no wrong. I had an ambition to meet you then, but I became alarmed and hid. Then when a mix-up of identities seemed at hand, I got out through the stage door.'

"'And what brought you back today?'

"'The fascination of the thing, I guess. This time I bought a ticket and took the seat intending to see the play again and then make an effort to meet you. I was on my way around to the stage door when the two men stopped me.'

"'Are you an actor?' I asked, after studying him a moment.

"'Not a professional, but I have acted in amateur plays. Never have I tried Anton Von Barwig in them, though,' he added quickly.

"'But you know Von Barwig?'

"'Perfectly! I know him as you know him—from watching you.'

"The thought came to me that here, perhaps, was my chance to see my Von Barwig acted as I played him—as nearly as possible.

"'Would you care to do the *'If you don't vant her'* scene for me now?' I asked.

"'I'd love to.'

"I told him to go ahead. He gave a marvelous demonstration of my own methods. It seemed I was looking in a mirror at myself. When he finished I congratulated him warmly. Then my plan suddenly became enlarged.

"'How would you like to play Anton Von Barwig for me at next Wednesday's matinee?' I asked.

"His face glowed with expectancy. 'You mean here—with your company—on the stage?' he blurted.

"'Exactly! I want to see you do it.'

"'It would make me the happiest man in the world.'

"'Fine! You shall play the rôle next Wednesday afternoon while I look on. Nobody shall know it isn't I. Don't tell anybody.'

"'Oh, I wont—I wont,' he said excitedly. 'I'll be here at 1:30 o'clock in make-up.' He turned to go.

"'Just a moment!' I called. 'You haven't told me your name.'

"He hesitated, grew more nervous and finally said: 'It's Smith.' And out the stage door he went almost on a run."

MR. WARFIELD took another long pull at his cigar.

"Did he play the matinee?" I asked.

"He did not," replied the noted actor. "He never came back, and I never heard from him again. I tried to find him but, having no clue as to his whereabouts, failed.

"Now you undoubtedly realize what my mystery is," Mr. Warfield concluded. "It concerns that man. I want to find him. I still have my desire to see Anton Von Barwig acted as I would play him, and my only chance to have the wish gratified appears to rest with Smith, the unknown."

The Skull in the Lease

What would you think, if on reading over the lease of a house you wanted to rent, you discovered that one of the clauses stated that in a recess in the hall wall was a grinning skull which must not be removed? If it were, in addition to the lease being broken, all sorts of disaster would come upon the house and residents.

There are several such houses in England, notably that of Burton Agnes Hall in Yorkshire, where the skull is that of one of three sister owners in the days of Elizabeth, who was assaulted by footpads; and with her last dying breath she begged that her skull be kept as a relic of her.

Her sisters agreed, but on burial left the head on the body until they had their fill of hauntings, when the dead woman's wish was carried out.

Several times owners tried to dispose of the skull, but each time were made miserable until it was restored to the house, where it now is.

Another house is that of Wardley Hall in Lancashire, where the skull is in plain view in a recess in the wall of a stairway landing. The skull, to which various legends are attached, is that of a Roman Catholic priest who suffered for his beliefs.

In Bettiscombe Manor in Dorsetshire rests The Screaming Skull, so called from the story that several times when attempts have been made to remove it, appalling screams have come from its grinning jaws.

And there are other houses with the same uncanny occupant and guardian.

The Murillo Mystery

By BEULAH POYNTER

A TWO PART STORY—CONCLUSION

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

WHILE he is alone in Herndon Hall—all the servants except Hayes, the butler, having been called away—Anthony Herndon, art collector and connoisseur, is mysteriously murdered. The body is discovered by his daughter, Margery, who summons Clancy of the Police.

Dolores, Anthony's young Spanish wife, returns home with Ward Gresham, fiancé of Margery, a physician Herndon had secretly commissioned to cure Dolores of the drug habit. When Dolores discovers her husband is dead, she falls into a coma.

Ward's hunch that the Murillos, which the collector bought because of the resemblance between the model and his young wife, have something to do with the murder, gains new weight when Jerry Lancaster, Margery's unsuccessful suitor, discovers that his identical pictures are being exhibited in town.

Margery and Jerry set out to interview the owner, Señor Estabán, but do not find him in. However, they do come upon a taxi-driver whom Margery remembers as one of Dolores' former companions. They decide he can bear watching. Ward also learns that Shields, the Herndons' chauffeur, is aware of Dolores' addiction to morphine.

The day on which the will is to be read by Mr. Seddon, Anthony Herndon's attorney, Dolores comes out of her coma and calls for her stepdaughter. To Margery she pours out the story of her life, admitting that she had never really loved Herndon but had married him for his name and money when she had wrongly thought her young lover dead.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME AMAZING INFORMATION

MARGERY had not realized how long she had been closeted with her stepmother until upon entering the library she saw the portly, erect figure of the family attorney seated between the two younger men.

John Seddon rose at her appearance and extended his hand with the half-expressed sympathy he always accorded her when meeting her.

It was as though he hesitated to put into words the intense pity he felt for a young girl left entirely alone, and one whose bravery and poise commanded his admiration.

"I didn't hear you come in, Mr. Seddon," Margery said, smiling into his grave, kindly face. "Have you been here long?"

"I just arrived, my dear, though our young friends were giving me some most amazing information. Most amazing!"

"You mean about the Murillos?"

"Yes. That Anthony Herndon could ever have been deceived in a

painting astounds me. I am little familiar with art myself, but your father gave a lifetime to its study. Dear, dear! This is truly unfortunate."

"Then you think father purchased frauds when he bo'.ght those pictures?"

"It would appear so. I sincerely hope the man who owns the ones you saw on exhibition can give you some information to the contrary, but I seriously doubt it. It's particularly unfortunate for you if these prove to be only copies for your father paid over a hundred thousand dollars for them."

Jerry whistled.

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes, that was the amount. I remember him distinctly mentioning the price at the time of the purchase, for I remonstrated with him. He sold some property which was bringing in a good per cent to obtain the money. I've spoken to you before, I think, Margery, about his disposing of property against my advice."

"Yes, I remember."

"And if these are copies," mused Ward, "they would be practically worthless."

"I'm afraid so."

"I was hoping father had sold the genuine to Señor Estabán," said Margery eagerly, "and that you had some record of the sale—or knew something about the money."

The attorney shook his head.

"No, and I'm quite sure had Anthony contemplated doing anything of the kind he would have mentioned it to me. I've often urged him to dispose of some of his treasures for——" He hesitated. "I'm sorry, Margery, but during the last few months your father was in slight financial difficulties."

"Mr. Seddon!"

"Nothing serious," he hastened to add, "just enough to curtail his extravagant expenditure of money for things of no intrinsic value—you know, like those in your drawing-room."

JERRY'S generous mouth curved a trifle at the older man's pedantic, carefully chosen words.

He moved casually to the opposite side of the room and stood in a shadow watching the lovely face of the girl as she leaned toward the lawyer, her reddish curls almost touching his thin, silvery hair.

The delicate flush on her smooth cheeks made his skin look in contrast withered and yellow like parchment.

"Fuss budget!" Jerry apostrophized him as usual.

And the epithet was not inapplicable, for Seddon lacked repose and had an irritating habit of cracking the enlarged knuckles of his right hand and tapping his right foot, a habit that had always annoyed Jerry Lancaster, and particularly tonight, when the room fairly vibrated with tension.

"You don't think, Mr. Seddon," Margery said, laying her hand on his, not so much in affection as to stop the cracking of knuckles, "that father's mind preyed on this trouble—and that it led him to take his life?"

Ward stiffened. Jerry took a step forward.

"I did think of it at first," the lawyer replied reflectively. "I admit that the moment I heard of his death it was the first thing that occurred to me, but after coming here, and hearing what the police had to say, I dismissed the idea.

"Anthony was worried—yes—but"—he smiled—"but really, as a matter of fact, not nearly so worried as I was. He had never known what it was to need money—and I had. I remember the last time I had any conversation with him alone that I

impressed upon him the necessity of practicing a little economy."

"When was that?" Ward asked.

"I dined here, didn't I, Margery, the night of the murder?"

"Yes, Mr. Seddon."

"I think I was alone with him then, I'm not quite certain."

"You couldn't have been," said the girl, "because you left with me when I went to meet Jerry. Don't you remember? I was going to use my car, and you offered to drive me to town in yours."

"Oh, yes. So I recall. Well, possibly the conversation took place in my office some days previous. It was of so little moment it slipped my memory."

"Personally, I think the suicide theory is bunk!" Jerry said bluntly, "and if the police don't get at something tangible soon, Margery should hire some private detectives."

"I strongly endorse that statement," the lawyer answered emphatically. "And now, my dear, I have brought your father's will and testament as you desired. Is your stepmother in condition to join us—or——"

He looked questioningly at Ward.

"She says so," Margery interposed. "What do you say, Ward?"

"I'll bring her."

CHAPTER XIV

ANTHONY HERNDON'S WILL

SEDDON slowly folded the document and laid it upon the table.

Margery's face was pale, but that of her stepmother was livid ashen gray, and the two young men's countenances showed blank amazement.

"I—I—can't understand it," the young girl stammered, "to not even mention Dolores—not even her name—I——"

"I don't believe it!" Dolores cried wildly. "It's a mistake! Anthony loved me! He promised I should be cared for! Why—you—you—told me I would inherit everything! Everything!"

She pointed at Seddon, her hand shaking visibly.

"You will come in for your widow's third," the lawyer answered dryly.

His voice trembled a trifle and he avoided the woman's dark eyes.

"Third!" she shrilled. "There's another will! *This one* was made before we were married! I know it! Let me look at it!"

She snatched it up from the table and looked at the date.

"You see! Before we were married."

"Yes, so I told you, but there was no other will drawn up."

"Then why—why did you lie to me?"

She turned accusingly on him, flinging the paper from her as though its touch seared her fingers.

Seddon appeared to humor her.

"I didn't, Mrs. Herndon. I told you I was endeavoring to induce Anthony to provide for you liberally, and that he had promised to do so, but his unfortunate death cut him off before that was possible."

"You're lying now!" she cried. "A will was made! You drew it up! Why are you hiding it? You told me the day Anthony signed it that"—she placed her hands on the table, bringing her eyes on a level with his—"no matter what happened to my husband, I would be a rich woman."

"Mr. Seddon!" Margery's voice crackled. "Is this true?"

He shook his head.

"No, she has mistaken my statement."

"I haven't!" Dolores' hands beat upon the polished mahogany. "You said the will was in that safe! That one behind the panel! This isn't it!

The other is there! There! That's the one to read! The one that gives me everything! Everything — and cuts her off! Read it!"

"My dear Mrs. Herndon"—the lawyer imprisoned the fluttering hands—"calm yourself. No such will was ever made. There's no document of any kind in the safe!"

"Take your hand off me, you lecherous old viper! You knew I schemed and plotted for this! I wont be cheated out of a fortune! Open that safe! The will is there! Why wont you read it? Are you in love with *her?* Do you think she'll have you?"

"Dolores!" Margery's cheeks flamed angrily.

The woman wheeled defiantly.

"You've all plotted against me!" she screamed. "The will was drawn up! He knows it! You all know it! If it isn't in the safe, you've stolen it, taken advantage of me while I was in bed unable to protect myself!"

"That's a pretty raw statement," Jerry said brutally.

"She's—she's—she doesn't realize what she is saying," Seddon murmured miserably. "She doesn't intend to accuse anyone."

"Oh, yes I do! I know perfectly well what I am saying. Well, why don't you open the safe? You know the combination, Margery."

MARGERY moved as if impelled against her will.

Seddon's gesture arrested her.

"There's no other will, child," he said quietly. "Mrs. Herndon is drawing on a vivid imagination."

"Am I? Let me tell you I saw the will. I read it!" defiantly. "Yes. I came down here one night when everyone was asleep and I opened the safe. I read every word of it. He gave her nothing but his miserable old manuscripts!"

"You—opened the safe!"

Margery's lips became as white as her face.

"Yes! I was going to know how much it was worth my while to stay here, and I did learn. I'll open it now if you don't."

She caught at a chair to steady herself as she stumbled across the room. The others stared at one another with various expressions on their faces, bland intolerance for hysterical insanity on the lawyer's, utter bewilderment and pain on Margery's, half credulity on Jerry's, while Ward's countenance was a mask expressing nothing.

The lock clicked. The woman whirled triumphantly as she drew out the metal box. Her fingers fairly tore at the papers as she flung them from her. Then she gave a sob of disappointment and chagrin.

"It isn't here! There's no will here!" she moaned, letting the box clatter to the floor.

"Of course not, Dolores!" Margery ran to her side. "Mr. Seddon would have known if any other will had been drawn up! And surely he would have no object in denying it had there been."

Dolores pushed her aside.

"No, he wouldn't have!" she mumbled. "Only—there was a will. I tell you, I read it. Maybe—maybe another lawyer made it—or——"

She pressed her hands against her temples.

"I'll remember—and I'll find it if it's the last thing I ever do!"

"She's insane, absolutely insane!" exclaimed the lawyer as Margery led the shaking woman out of the room.

"I'm not sure," Ward replied. "Unless she's insane to admit in the face of her husband's murder that she unlocked his safe and read his will."

"You don't imagine for an instant Anthony Herndon made a will that would cut Margery off with practical-

ly nothing?" Jerry laughed incredulously.

"Old men have been known to do foolish, sometimes criminal things when infatuated with unscrupulous women."

The doctor crossed toward the stairway.

"Jerry, don't leave without me. She's my patient, and I don't want Margery alone with her. I'll be back in a minute."

CHAPTER XV

ESTABAN SPEAKS

"WARD," Margery said as the young doctor admitted her into his private office the following morning at a little after nine o'clock, "I am absolutely convinced that there was another will, and that, as Dolores said father willed everything to her."

Jerry Lancaster, who had been seated at the window facing Park Avenue and watching an old lady try ineffectually several times to cross the street, rose with a little grunt:

"Rot, Marge."

"Do you realize what that means if it were true?" Ward asked.

"Yes. Oh, I don't say Mr. Seddon drew it up. I quite believe his statement, and Dolores isn't certain on that point, but she was rational this morning as I am, and still insists she read the will, but paid no heed to any signature but daddy's.

"She admits now that that was the only reason she married him, and lived with him afterward, and declares that if the will isn't found she will take the matter to court to break this one."

The girl dropped wearily into a chair and pressed a handkerchief against her lips.

"Might as well admit then that she killed him to come into the property," growled Jerry.

"Alibi perfect," returned the other man.

He snapped a medicine case shut and reached for his hat.

"Are you ready? I decided after all to telephone Señor Estabán that we wished to see him and have made an appointment to call at ten. I'll tell Miss Morris I shan't be back until after luncheon."

It was one of those curiously unseasonable days that the weather man sometimes injects in the midst of a New York winter. After a week of snow, then rain, then bitter, biting cold, the sun had suddenly decided to pour golden warm rays upon brown frozen ground; to turn the gray murky sky into a sparkling canopy of turquoise and fleecy white.

THOUGH comparatively early, automobile owners were taking advantage of a pleasant day, and when they cut into Central Park the driveway was crowded. Taxis scurried by, limousines, sport cars, roadsters, kept up an incessant honking of horns and buzzing of engines.

When New York, most fickle and changeable of ladies, casts aside her frown her children usually adapt themselves to her mood and the sheath of restlessness or depression, worry and incessant hurry which is so characteristic of the city's inhabitants, is dropped for a few hours.

Even Margery, who since her father's death had moved about like an automaton at the command of a magician, felt her spirits lift a trifle. The dull, apathetic look in her eyes disappeared and she breathed deeply, half unconscious of the stimulant of the fresh invigorating air.

Jerry, as usual, was alert, his bright eyes shifting from one side of the road to the other, acutely sensi-

tive to the presence of the girl seated before him.

But Ward was unsmiling, his brows knit in a brown study that did not leave him even at the entrance of the hotel.

"Señor Estabán will see you. On the fourth floor to your right," they were informed.

A SMALL, dapper man, quite swarthy, with a carefully trimmed beard and beady dark eyes, stood in an open doorway as they turned the corridor.

With the frankly expressed admiration of the foreigner for any feminine beauty he stared at Margery until embarrassment flooded her cheeks with warm color.

He was exceedingly cordial, invited them into the living-room of the suite he occupied, and requested them to be seated.

"Thees—thees visit is all the more —'ow you say—pleasurable because of the young señorita," he murmured with a perceptible stress on his r's and elimination of *h's*. "Of course, I am mos' glad that you called, Señor Gres'am, but you said nothing over the telephone about Señorita—Señorita——" He hesitated.

"Herndon," Margery smiled.

"'Erndon. Ah, the name is familiar. I 'ave 'ad a business transaction weeth a Meester 'Erndon, also of thees city."

"Yes!" Margery became eager. "That—that is why we are here, Señor. My father was Anthony Herndon."

"No!" He jumped up excitedly. "You are 'is so beautiful daughter. I did not know he 'ad one. 'E is a most fortunate man. I congratulate 'im."

"This business with father"—she suggested—"was it recent? Had it something to do with paintings?"

He smiled.

"That is for your father to say. To a measure already I 'ave my promise broke to 'im."

"Promise? What kind of a promise?"

"That would be disclosing a secret I should keep locked 'ere." He tapped his shirt front. "I regret very much to be discourteous. But—please, at the risk of being—not a gentleman, I ask you to speak to your father about it, not to me."

"But—you see"—Margery glanced questioningly at Ward, who nodded—"you see, Mr. Señor Estabán, my father is no longer alive."

"Not dead!"

"Yes."

"Oh, I am so sorry. When did he die?"

"Almost two weeks ago."

"Two weeks!"

The little man jerked his cigarette from his mouth.

"Two weeks and I 'ave not 'eard."

"It was all in the papers," Jerry volunteered grimly.

"I am mos' ignorant; I—do not read the English. I speak it very well; I comprehend it spoken; but I do not read it. A mos' great disadvantage when the papers every day 'ave so much of interest in them. 'E die suddenly—your father?"

"Very suddenly."

Ward spoke for the first time since entering the room:

"He was murdered."

"Murdered!"

The pigment of his swarthy skin became green.

He choked. He caught at the button of his collar as though it were choking him, staggered backward, then dropped into a large overstuffed chair, overcome with horror.

"Perdon!" he murmured after a moment, "I am overcome, I—murder, oh, so terrible a theeng to 'appen to heem. When—when——?"

WARD, who had risen at the man's emotion, said slowly:

"Just ten days ago tonight, Señor Estabán at—as nearly as we can judge, between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty!"

"*Dios!* You—weel perhaps better understand my—my per—perturbation when I tell you—that I—I myself——"

He jerked himself upright and wiped a brow damp with beads of perspiration.

"In 'is 'ome you say, murdered?"

"I didn't say—in his home," Ward answered grimly. "But it so happens that he *was* murdered in his home. But you interrupted yourself. You were going to tell us something.'

"*Si, si.* I—myself—I called upon Meester 'Erndon—at hees home about thees business, and that night 'e said to me—said that eef anyone knew 'e 'ad so much money upon heem that I—I am mixed in my English—now—the words she wont come."

"You want to say," Ward suggested, quieting Margery's exclamation of amazement with a wave of his hand. "that Mr. Herndon feared an attack on his life because of a sum of money in his possession?"

"*Si.* That ees it."

"A very large amount?"

"*Si.*"

"How much?"

"One hundred and ten thousand dollars."

Jerry whistled. Margery's teeth bit deeply into her lower lip.

"Yes."

There was no emotion in Ward's voice.

"And the money?"

"I 'ave said to him, then, 'Why do you keep eet in this house; why do you not 'ave wanted a check certified?' And he 'ave answered, 'Because I weesh no one, not even my lawyer, to know of thees money.'

"And then he show to me thee—thee—peestol 'e 'ave that day bought for himself's protection and 'e laugh—and say 'Over my body they get thees!'

"That is why—you understand—I am so, so—shocked—so seeck! Somebody—*Dios!* It might 'ave been myself they killed! I 'ad no peestol—and I carried that money 'ere—in my pocket!"

"Suppose you tell us all about it if you can, Señor." Ward sat down opposite him. "Take your time. You see we knew nothing at all about this money."

THE little man gulped, reached for a decanter on the table and poured out a glass of wine with an apologetic smile.

"Your English ees so difficult. Thees way eet is. Meester 'Erndon weesh to sell me hees Murillos——"

"Oh!"

Margery sprang to her feet.

Ward put his arm about her in a caress of silence.

"Thees Murillos, some months ago 'e 'ave bought from me in Madrid, when—well, I 'ave need of money then, and I sell them. Understand? I lofe them, but I mus' sell, and 'e give to me one hundred thousand dollars; so I wring my 'eart and say 'all right.'

"Soon, very soon after, my so reech oncle die and leave to me—what to me is a mos' beeg fortune. So I write Meester 'Erndon and ask of him to buy—er—sell back to me thees painting of my ancestor.

"'E write back 'no.' I offer 'eem more *dinero.* Still he write 'No.' Then I come on a veesit to your so wonderful city—and write Meester 'Erndon again, that I would like to see him, and enjoy the call.

"We meet. Thees time 'e consider my offer, and he talk—we talk—and 'e say maybe—he loved the pictures

also—maybe somebody can make a so good copy for heem that no one can the difference tell—understand?"

Ward nodded.

"We together hunt till we find an artist—a poor boy—very, very good, and Meester 'Erndon send the pictures to heem to be copied."

"Hem! Do you remember them being out of the library, Margery?" Ward asked abruptly.

"Why—why—he did send them away to be reframed—he said—a month ago. But not until this moment did I recall it."

"*Si.* A month—that's it, a month ago," Estabán smiled. "The young artist copy very well, but Meester 'Erndon he hesitate, and hesitate.

"He do not want to sell me back my pictures. He feel ashamed for giving up something so precious. I grow despair. Then 'e consent, and I take the ones I love and pay to 'eem ten thousand money in bills and offer to 'eem the check. 'E say no 'e must 'ave no check, and say I am to give 'eem the money.

"Your father 'ave known me many year and thees—attitude make me mos' angry until 'e explain 'e do not intend to put the money in the bank, nor to let anyone know he 'as eet. 'E is what you call—sensitive—about owning a copy—and he make me promise not to tell about my purchase, not to anyone.

'E do not want 'is wife to know. Mos' specially not 'is wife. I understand. I know women very well. They like the jewels, is it not so? So I understand. I theenk perhaps maybe he is too sensitive, but I understand.

"A man who loves the genuine is ashamed of the fraud, and yet 'e did not want anyone to know 'e can no longer afford the genuine. So I take my paintings and 'e take his copies to 'is 'ome, very late at night, when 'is wife is away, so she did not know."

"Nor I," murmured Margery.

"You see, 'e trust me."

He smiled almost childishly.

"An' when I telephone I am seeck and cannot come at once to him with thee money 'e say all right maybe 'e come to me.

"But 'e ees busy so eet is the two nights after I take thee money to heem, and he show to me the pistol and thee new pictures on thee wall, and say about the fear and that the pictures look so very good."

"You left the money with him that night?" Ward asked slowly.

"Yes. Eet was in one thousand dollar bills, Americano, in a leather wallet."

"Why did you go at night? Why not in the day time?"

"Señor 'Erndon wish it so. 'E wish not to be disturbed while I am there so no one would know of the exchange but himself."

"At what hour were you there?"

"Quite early. About nine, maybe not so late; perhaps at eight-thirty."

"And left early?"

"I like your cabarets, and I weesh-ed to be downtown before ten. I had a lady waiting for me."

"I suppose you know where to find the chap who made the copies?"

"Oh, yes. I 'ave 'is address. I weel give it to you."

He started to rise, but Ward interposed with "That'll wait."

MECHANICALLY the young physician reached for a cigar and lighted it.

"Under the circumstances, how did you come to exhibit the paintings?"

"That was mos' unforeseen. Señor Sibley is a friend of mine. He called to see me jus' after they were delivered here. I could not hide them from 'im, and 'e admired them very much; but 'e said it was dangerous to leave them unguarded in a 'otel. So I theenk, too.

"'E offered to care for them until I sailed. So"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I permit 'eem to take them to 'is shop. I—I forget to say not exhibit—and 'e put them in the window."

"Darned lucky for you he did, Marge!" Jerry whispered.

"And this money, Señor Estabán. What did Mr. Herndon do with it?"

"That I cannot say. He said 'e would put eet in 'is safe; that is all I know. Was it not there?"

"Not a cent. Not a sou!"

"You mean 'e was robbed—also?"

"Yes. At last we've found the motive for the murder!" Jerry exploded.

"Will you object to coming with us to a detective, Señor, and telling him what you have told us?" Ward asked abruptly.

"Not at all. I should be mos' 'appy to serve you and thee Señorita."

He bowed to Margery, volatile, quite composed again.

"A detective, Ward, you've engaged one?" Margery looked surprised.

"Honey, I hope you aren't angry, but the morning after we discovered your father's death I hired young Clancy and told him to get busy."

"Clancy!"

Her brows puckered.

"The patrolman you picked up on the road."

"But he's a policeman."

"He's a private detective *now*, and I think he'll prove a good one. He said he'd always wanted to tackle a case on his own, and I gave him the job. Not much to work on before, but he has plenty now."

CHAPTER XVI

CLANCY HAS A CLUE

OVER a Chop Suey restaurant on upper Third Avenue, Dennis Clancy had an office—only a part of a space which had once been a store-room, up three flights of rickety wooden stairs, with nothing but a bare wooden table and three chairs for furnishings.

For three years he had paid rent on the little apartment. It was his habit to adjourn after his beat or at such hours he had to spare and pore over famous criminal cases on records or yellow-backed books written on the prowess of imaginery heroes of detective literature.

When still in knee trousers, he had had a vast ambition to follow in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes and Burns or Dougherty. Probably his first boyish disappointment had been the realization that Holmes had never existed in flesh and blood.

He never quite outgrew the ambition, but after leaving school he had gone on the New York police force, because his father had been a policeman until he had died, and his father before him.

His mother, a stout, well-fed, comfortable Irish woman with no illusions, sniffed at her boy's love of books; and after she had burned several copies of "that trash" she had found in his bedroom, Clancy had taken his treasures to the Third Avenue room and said nothing more about his ambition.

If he spent less time at home than formerly she decided he had a "girl" and that suited her infinitely better than that he should hang around the flat with his nose stuck in a book.

SHE knew he saved his money, though she didn't know that the dollars put in the bank every month were eventually to open his own agency, or she would probably have done more than sniff.

In one way she was right in her deductions about the girl. There was one, though at present neither Clancy nor Maggie Quinn realized they were

in love with each other; they were pals.

Maggie, snub-nosed, blue-eyed, with hair as black and unruly as Clancy's own, was as much interested in the science or art or profession or whatever you may call it, of detecting as Clancy himself.

Maggie was eighteen. She worked in the Chop Suey restaurant below, as cashier. And it was there Clancy had first met her.

Almost from their first meeting a friendship had sprung up between them which had led the boy to invite her to his "office" one night after he had eaten a meal of chow mein followed by a huge slab of lemon pie. There he showed his now considerable library.

"Some day, Maggie," he had chuckled, "all this study will pay me. Nothing has come of it yet, but a fellow can't spend as much time over anything as I have over this and be a boob all his life! Wait till I nab a bird with a ten thousand dollar reward on his head, and then ma will sing another tune."

"Gee! You must know a lot!" she had exclaimed admiringly and smiled; and Clancy decided that if she wasn't pretty she had nice teeth and a lot of common sense.

She had been so interested in everything he told her that he often spent hours of his precious time reading aloud to her, and together they argued and quarreled over the solution of this crime, the motive for that one, as though they had been hired to track down the criminal.

Maggie worked at night, and usually the restaurant closed about the same hour Clancy left his beat. So they had plenty of time to spend together.

THEY had had a squabble three nights before the Herndon murder, and Clancy had carefully avoided the Manchu Restaurant, determined to teach Maggie Quinn that, though she might be clever, no girl could tell him he was all wrong about the Elinsby case.

But the quarrel was forgotten after a conversation with Dr. Ward Gresham. That conversation had taken place in the library after Clancy had come in upon the physician studying the paintings.

Ward had had no desire for sleep and over cigars and a pony of brandy, the young patrolman, excited about the murder, about being first on the scene of the crime, had warmed up to the older man. After being led on to give some of his opinions of the crime he had propounded a theory that interested the doctor.

Before Hayes called them in to breakfast, Ward had learned a great deal about the boy, his ambitions to get into detective service and eventually open an agency of his own. And that information was what had induced him to engage Clancy to do some work on his own.

From then on Clancy was a busy man. When at his regular job, which he did not resign even though strongly tempted to do so, he had another young chap whom he could trust following up clues and searching for evidence, and he himself scarcely ate or slept.

He had a telephone installed in his "office" and either Maggie or Terry Dolan, his assistant, hung around for calls—the only messages he received coming from Doctor Gresham.

MARGERY had seen him innumerable times during the first week after the inquest in the library poking about the grounds, talking to the servants, and had been questioned by him herself; but it had never occurred to her that he was in Ward's employ, or rather indirectly in her own.

Certainly she had been unaware

that immediately after she had given Ward the number of the swarthy Cuban's taxicab, that Ward had in turn handed it over to Clancy with instructions to find the man; and if possible detain him on a trumped-up charge—anything—but detain him!

Maggie was in the office sitting on the deal table with a pile of newspapers spread around her, her skinny little legs with their rolled stockings dangling, when the four visitors climbed the three flights of stairs and entered the room.

She blushed with confusion when she saw Margery and jumped from her perch, smoothing her red and black plaid skirt, and pulling down her gray sweater.

"Where's Clancy?" Ward asked abruptly.

"He phoned a half hour ago that he was on his way here," she answered, "so I 'spose he'll be here any minute. Wont you sit down?"

She shyly pushed the three chairs forward, then looked about in embarrassment for something for the fourth one to sit on.

"Never mind me." Jerry leaped on the table. "I'm long and my legs can touch the floor."

"Who are you?" Ward asked the girl.

"Oh, I help Dennis."

"A girl detective?" Margery inquired in surprise.

Maggie's dimples came into play.

"No, but Dennis likes to talk things over with me. I stimulate him, he says. Here he is now."

CLANCY came into the room with a bound. He had seen the roadster parked at his door and knew by it who his visitors were.

He had run all the way, three stairs at a time, in his excitement. He jerked off his cap and bowed to Margery.

"Gee! I'm glad to see you here, Gresham!" he exclaimed; "I've been trying to locate you. You weren't in your office; I've landed your Cuban bird!"

"Cortez?" cried Margery.

"Yes."

"Did you arrest him?"

"No. Nothing to hang on him, though he looks shady, and Terry Dolan is keeping tabs on him. He owns his own car, a Bluak; has a bonafide taxi driver's license; hangs out at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth most of the time; keeps his car in a public garage near the corner; mosies along picking fares wherever he can the rest of it; seems to work with no one.

"He admitted quite frankly he knew Mrs. Herndon when she was La Bonita; used to drive her from her apartment on Riverside and Hundred and Tenth, almost every night when she was on the stage; felt he knew her pretty well because they spoke the same language; never sees her now since she had married!"

He paused for breath, then laughed abruptly.

"Sorry, I could not arrest him. But he wont get away. He doesn't know I'm a cop. I wore my citizen's clothes when I talked to him, and had him drive me from Fiftieth to the Battery and talked to him all the way like a boob.

"I pretended I was new in New York and nutty to get news about the sensational Herndon murder. That led him on to brag about his acquaintance with the lady."

"Maybe he's cleverer than you thought," mused Ward, "and was really leading *you* on."

Clancy's face dropped, but brightened instantly.

"Not he. He may be a crook, but if he is, he's a cheap one. Bootlegger, dope peddler, or——"

"Dope peddler!" Margery's cheeks flamed. "Ward, that's what he is—

a dope peddler, and that's where—"

"Yes, dear. I'm certain of it, but we've got to get the goods on him to prove it."

"And I thought—I might have guessed it all along."

She walked abruptly to the window and stared out at the elevator tracks.

"Now, Clancy," Ward speaking, "I've something of genuine importance for you. Señor Estabán has a story to tell you."

He turned to the Spaniard.

Clancy's face was very serious during Estabán's recital, and after the Spaniard had ceased to speak he looked steadily at the torn paper on the wall opposite him for several seconds, a deep scowl bringing his black brows together.

"Of course, Doctor Gresham, and you, Miss Herndon, you know what this looks like, don't you?" he asked at length.

"You—you told him about the scene in the library and the will, Ward?"

Margery moved from the window.

"Yes, I told him about that early this morning. Yes, Clancy," turning again to the policeman, "I know what it looks like."

"Of course," Clancy continued, "there's nothing I'd like better than to keep right on the case, to be the one at the finish and lay my hands on the—murderer, but it's a pretty big job, Doctor. Do you think *I'm big* enough for it?"

"Why not, Clancy?"

"Well"—he drew a deep breath—"you've got some dope here that the police haven't, and for which the newspapers would give a fortune."

"It's because I don't want the papers to get hold of it that you're on the job. So far no one but ourselves knows of the sale of the pictures. No one but ourselves and the *person who robbed and murdered Anthony Herndon* knows of the money that was in that safe.

"And ninety chances out of a hundred that person feels certain that no one but himself was aware that Herndon ever had the money, and is feeling pretty safe right now because of the fact.

"Once this story is blated about in the papers and the man is forewarned—taken off his guard—and we've lost him."

"But——"

Clancy still hesitated, torn between his ambition and his duty toward the doctor and Margery. "If headquarters is kept in ignorance you may be tieing your hands. They've facilities I don't possess. Operatives—shadowers—on the bird I just interviewed—around Herndon Hall and——"

"Hire as many as you like, Clancy; don't spare a dollar, and keep them busy," Ward answered brusquely.

"You have a lot of faith in me!" Clancy grinned.

"I've faith in my hunches. We played a hunch on the Murillos, Clancy. Jerry ran it to earth, but the hunch was there. I've got a hunch that if Mr. Herndon's murderer is ever apprehended, you're the boy who is going to do it."

He grasped the lad's large freckled hand.

WHEN the office was empty, Clancy got busy on the wire.

He called his friend Terry Dolan, who was even then impatiently awaiting a summons in a cigar store on Third Avenue not far from one Hundred and Twenty-fifth, and informed him to stick around the garage where the Cuban kept his taxi, and not to let the man out of his sight.

Then he told Maggie to hang around and answer any calls while he himself went out on an investigation.

He crossed over to Lexington, took

a downtown subway and alighted at Wall Street.

Out of the labyrinth of exits, revolving doors, through corridors, past the coffee shops, candy kitchens pop-corn and news stands of subterranea he at last found a staircase leading to the elevators of a huge office building.

As he stood consulting a directory a woman brushed by him, leaving the elevator nearest the door. Clancy turned just in time to see a slender figure in a mink coat descending the stairs that led into Lower Broadway.

He had a fleeting glimpse of pale gold hair under a smart brown cloche hat, and he started after her.

A fat man collided with him, obstructing his vision for a moment, and murmuring profuse apologies—just a moment, but long enough for the women to have stepped into a black limousine and its driver to have started the engine.

Clancy looked about frantically for a cab. None was in sight. He ran to the corner, but already the limousine had disappeared.

Growling maledictions on the fat man, Clancy retraced his steps, entered the express car and shot up to the twentieth story.

CHAPTER XVII

WHERE THERE'S A WILL—

"MR. SEDDON in?" the officer inquired of the boy at a desk near a swinging gate.

"Yeh. Who wants him?"

"I do. Never mind my name. Where's his office?"

"Orders not to show any one in 'less announced," the boy mumbled.

"How do you get that way? Do you know what I am?" Clancy grinned.

"Sure. You're a cop."

"All right. Where's his office?"

"Down the hall. First door to your right."

The lawyer looked up with a frown of annoyance at Clancy's intrusion, for the patrolman entered without knocking. The frown was instantly replaced with a puzzled smile.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Seddon?"

"Yes."

"My name's Clancy. I'm working on the Herndon case, and understand you were Anthony Herndon's lawyer."

"I was, yes. Please take a chair."

He indicated one near a littered flat-topped desk, but Clancy moved around to the window and seated himself with his back to the light.

"I'm wondering if you can't give me a little information that'll be of some assistance, Mr. Seddon."

"I'd like to, I'm sure, but I'm afraid I know very little either of interest or importance."

"Maybe that's what you think," Clancy laughed genially, "but maybe I might think differently. Mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all."

He extended a lighter.

"Have one?"

"Thanks no. I don't indulge. Never smoked as a lad, consequently don't feel the need of it now. If you care to ask me some questions, Mr. Clancy, I'll be glad to answer them, if I can; but I can offer no suggestions myself."

Clancy drew from his pocket a picture of Dolores and placed it face upward on the desk.

"Ever see her on the stage, Mr. Seddon?" he inquired.

"It's Mrs. Herndon, isn't it?"

The lawyer adjusted his pince-nez and looked at it closely.

"No, I rarely attend the theatre, and never met her until her marriage to my friend. Why?"

"I was hoping you might know something about her antecedents. Don't know as it matters much, only I'm curious just why you withheld Anthony Herndon's last will!"

"What!" Seddon's knuckles cracked. "My dear young man, what an astounding question to ask!"

Clancy smiled.

"Oh, come clean, Mr. Seddon. Why did you?"

"I read Mr. Herndon's last will to his family."

"Oh, no you didn't. Dolores Herndon knew of the existence of another will. Why, she was down here not ten minutes ago to see you about it! If she wasn't certain that will existed she would never have come here, sick as she's been."

SEDDON bit his lip nervously. His parchment-like skin grew mottled.

"Yes, she was here," he choked, "but the woman is insane, absolutely insane."

"No. She isn't. Herndon made another will and you drew it up for him. He put *his* copy in his own safe. You have the *other*. Now isn't that so?"

A frightened look crept into the lawyer's faded eyes. He cracked the knuckles of his right hand several times, tapped his foot on the cement floor and coughed.

"Isn't it true?" Clancy repeated.

"I—I—damn it all! The thing was an outrage!" the attorney exploded desperately. "It deeded everything to his wife and left the girl nothing, nothing! I'd never have thought of holding it back if—when they opened the safe the document hadn't been missing.

"Then the thought came to me—after all there wasn't much left anyway, and what was rightfully belonged to Margery. After Mrs. Herndon received her widow's third—all she was entitled to by moral rights, if not legal—there'd be but little for Margery to live on. Criminal, maybe—but—I took the chance."

He collapsed completely, drew out a large linen handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"I take it you are fond of Miss Herndon?"

"Love her like a daughter. Was present at her christening—godfather."

His silvery head sank in his hands.

"Hey, buck up!" Clancy tapped him on the shoulder. "Just trot out the missing will. I want to take a squint at it."

"What-at will you do about it?"

"That's for Miss Herndon and her stepmother to say. Maybe Miss Herndon can calm the lady down a bit, but I imagine there'll be some fur scattered about. Let's see the other will."

"I—I——"

Seddon rubbed his hands together nervously, but he rose and crossed to a safe by the window, opened it, and at last found the paper that Clancy demanded.

The officer read it through, now and then glancing over its pages at that yellow, withered countenance of the perturbed attorney. Then he folded it slowly and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'll keep this, Mr. Seddon," he grinned. "You might be tempted to destroy it."

Seddon shook his head.

"No. I—I wanted to right a wrong. I've bungled. I shouldn't attempt it again."

CHAPTER XVIII

ARE HUNCHES SAFE?

JERRY left them at his own corner, saying he had a luncheon engagement; but the Spaniard, anxious to verify his statement about the artist who had made the

copies of the Murillos, volunteered to accompany them downtown to the studio in Greenwich Village where the young man lived.

The man they called upon readily gave them any information they desired; remembered the Spaniard immediately; recalled Mr. Herndon perfectly, also his injunction about secrecy being kept about the transaction.

They thanked him upon leaving, and Margery promised some day to pose for him, he having expressed a desire to transfer her burnished hair to canvas.

"I think, Margery," said the doctor when she urged him to dine with her at her home, "that you'll have to marry me and let me live with you. I spend all my spare hours at Herndon Hall, as it is."

A wan smile was her reply.

MARY WORTH was waiting for them on the veranda, evidently scanning the road for their appearance. She seemed perturbed, and her usually placid face showed perturbation.

"How's our patient?" Ward greeted her.

"Why, she went out this morning shortly after Miss Herndon left the house," the nurse replied. "She said you said she could, Doctor."

"Yes."

"And she told me she would be back in an hour, but she hasn't returned yet."

"Did she take the car?" Margery asked excitedly.

"Yes. She went out in the limousine with the chauffeur."

"He hasn't returned alone, has he?"

"No. I shouldn't have let her go, Doctor. I'm reproaching myself now. It's been four hours and over since she left."

MARGERY glanced at her watch, noted with added anxiety the hour, then went into the library. She never entered it without a shiver, but Ward, intent as always upon finding something that might help them to solve the mystery, usually spent his time there when at Herndon Hall.

"Will you have some tea, Ward?" Margery asked as he joined her. "Luncheon has been over an hour, but we could have tea."

"Bless me! I'd forgotten all about food. And you—dear—do you feel faint?"

She smiled.

"I'd forgotten it, too. I'll ask Annie to bring us some biscuits and tea."

She rang the bell, and when Annie appeared she gave her the order.

"Yes, ma'am, and here's a letter Mrs. Herndon gave me to hand you when you came in."

She fumbled about in her pocket until she found the envelope.

"Gave to you?" Margery said with surprise.

"Yes'm. I don't know why she gave it to me, 'less it's because she doesn't like the nurse or old Hayes."

Margery's hands trembled as she tore open the flap and drew out a thin slip of paper. She read the words scrawled in an uneven feminine handwriting, with her lips slowly tightening, her eyes darkening; then she handed the paper to Ward.

"She's gone," she said quietly. "We'll never find her now, unless we put detectives on her trail."

"Margery," he read aloud, "I'm not coming back, so you might as well give the nurse her *congé*. I've no intention of staying in the same house with a woman who deliberately plotted with a lawyer to rob her father's wife. There *was* another will and you know it.

"I told you the truth about Jimmie, with one exception; I have seen him

since I married Herndon, have seen him every day except when I was ill and by the time this reaches you I shall be with him, and I'm never going to leave him again.

"If I decide to fight you in court over the will, you'll hear from me; if not, I shall pass absolutely out of your life. Jimmie says that as long as nothing is left but the house and the paintings I'd be a fool to do it, but I think there's money somewhere, and if there is, it belongs to me. —Dolores Herndon."

"Jimmie? Jimmie who, Margery?"

"I don't know. I never asked her. When Shields comes back he might——"

Ward snapped his fingers, walked a few steps and whirled.

"She saw him every day—she—— Margery, I'll wager every dollar I possess that your good-looking chauffeur and this Jimmie are one and the same man."

"Ward! Impossible!"

"Not at all. He came here after she did. Probably she engaged him, not your father. He practically admitted being in love with her. You yourself commented on his interest. Listen."

HASTILY he retailed his conversation with the chauffeur the day he had been with him in the garage; called to her mind the many opportunities Dolores had had to be alone with the man, as neither Herndon nor Margery had used the car often. He grew excited in his deduction and paced back and forth nervously.

"Under the circumstances, Margery, publicity or no publicity, I believe we should notify the police of her disappearance, and have them send out a dragnet for her and the man."

"And Clancy?"

"Clancy has about all he can do just now looking into the money thing and the robbery."

"Don't you think it would be wise to consult Mr. Seddon before you say anything to the police, Ward? After all, we're pretty young and we don't know very much about criminals. He's a lawyer, with loads of experience and was daddy's best friend. I'd feel better if he advised us."

"Oh, if you think it best, call him by all means," he answered a trifle grudgingly.

"I think you're clever, Ward," she hastened to answer him, "and I rely absolutely on you. Only, honey, are hunches always safe to follow?"

He laughed.

"Just about as good as anything else I know of. But go ahead and call old Seddon if you like. Then I'll want to see if Clancy is in his office."

Before Margery could reach the door, the bell of the hall phone jangled.

She heard Annie answer:

"Yes, sir, he's here. Who wants him, please? Mr. Clancy? I'll call him."

"Clancy!" ejaculated Ward. "Must have some news, Margery, if he's ringing me here."

"Hello, Clancy," he said, taking the receiver from the maid, though she was evidently loathe to leave when on the eve of learning something of interest. "What's doing?"

"A lot!" came over the wire. "I've got the Cuban in stir over on Forty-seventh and Eighth, and I've got Mr. Herndon's *last* will!"

"What?" The receiver almost dropped from Ward's hand. "Then there *was* another."

"What is it, Ward?" Margery asked excitedly, coming to his side.

He shook his head at her.

"Bet there was another! Can't tell you about it now. Dolan got the dope on the Cuban. Called Hurley, that's the guy on that beat, and Hurley nabbed the greaser before he could get away.

"Hurley has him under arrest on the charge of peddling hop, and the Cuban refuses to talk. I've not seen him yet, but I think, between us we can open his mouth. There's more back of it than Hurley knows yet."

"I'll be right down, Clancy. I'll meet you at the station-house in forty-five minutes."

"All right. Wait for you."

WARD hung up the receiver and crossed to a hall tree for his hat and coat.

"What is it, Ward?" Margery asked again. "What did Clancy tell you? Where are you going?"

"To meet him at the police station. I'll have to explain to you later, dear. He couldn't tell me anything but that they've arrested the Cuban."

"I'm going with you."

"Not down there? It's no place for you. This taxi driver is a bad egg. He may say things I shouldn't want you to hear."

"I can stand them, but I couldn't stand the suspense of not knowing what was going on. This means everything to me, Ward."

"All right, as you like. Only hurry."

"I want to phone Mr. Seddon first."

"I haven't time to wait while you talk to him" (impatiently).

"I'll ask him to dinner, then, or make an appointment with him down at his office."

Ward started his engine while she was telephoning and she got into the machine with "He's coming to dinner tonight."

CHAPTER XIX

PLAYING IN LUCK

NEITHER spoke during the journey downtown. Ward's face was grim and hard, his jaw set, and his eyes glued to the road.

The girl sat on the edge of the seat, gripping it on either side with tensed, nervous fingers. They were going at an incredible speed, and several times she stifled a little terrified cry when it seemed almost impossible to avoid striking a street crosser or colliding with an elevated post.

When they reached the more congested portion of the city, Ward slowed down, smiled at her, and relaxed a little, but still remained silent until they pulled up before the gloomy brick structure on the side street.

"Better wait outside, Margery," he suggested.

"No," stubbornly.

"Never mind your other discovery just now, Clancy," Ward greeted the young officer who sprang toward the entrance when he saw them. "Tell me about Cortez first."

"Well"—Clancy cleared his throat as if uncertain where to begin with his story—"I put Terry—Dolan, you know—on his trail, and Terry never lost sight of him from the time I left him, though I'm afraid he's run up a taxi bill, Doctor, that'll stagger you."

"That's all right. Go on."

"Terry said Cortez didn't do much except jog along Broadway and Fifth looking for fares for a couple of hours. Once he drove a man from the Rastor down to the Vandorf, then beat it back in a hurry to Seventh Avenue near Fiftieth where he seemed to be looking for some one.

"Dolan got out of his car and went into a drugstore to keep an eye on him, for he parked his taxi on the

uptown side of Fiftieth and kept walking up and down. This was about eleven-fifty, Doctor.

"At twelve o'clock sharp by the clock in the drugstore a limousine crossed Broadway coming from Sixth, and our bird jumped into his cab and trailed after."

"A limousine!"

In her excitement Margery caught hold of Clancy's arm.

"Yes, ma'am. Terry got into the cab he'd kept waiting at the corner and beat it after the Cuban. The limousine cut across Fiftieth, turned north at Eighth Avenue, the Cuban after it, and Terry after him. At the Circle it swung west again, and stopped at a hotel under the Ninth Avenue L.

"Terry slowed up, and about a hundred feet away saw the taxi drive alongside of the limousine. The Cuban didn't get out, but he talked to someone in the limousine, then drove away, swinging back to Broadway and downtown, Terry still trailing him."

"But the limousine?" cried Ward. "What about it?"

"Terry said it was still there when he looked around. His orders were to follow Cortez, you know."

"Was it black?" Margery asked eagerly.

"Yeh, black, a Bierse."

"Ward! Could it have been ours and Dolores——?"

"There are thousands of black Bierse cars in New York, Margery. Let Clancy finish his story. Dolan got the name of the hotel, did he?"

"Sure. The Arlington, a tough joint with a bad reputation. Well, the Cuban mosied along slowly now. Picked up a downtown customer, dropped him at Forty-second street and then moved back to Forty-seventh.

"There he left his car; went into a restaurant and had some coffee and sinkers; went outside again, and seemed to be waiting for someone.

"He didn't wait very long, for a bird in a checked coat and slouch hat and with all the earmarks of a hop head, skinny face, hollow eyes, chalky skin, came out of a cigar store and got into the cab.

"Terry's a wise boy. He didn't need a map or dictionary to show him what that bird was after, and that trailing along behind in another car wouldn't get him anything. He made a flying leap, caught on to the tail end of the taxi, like a school kid, and looked through the window."

"And?"

"Before the Cuban saw him Terry saw the fare, the hop head, lean over and take something from the Cuban's hand—a little box. Terry yelled to the cop at the crossing just as he passed and squealed, 'Hold him!'

"The cop looked funny, thought him crazy, of course; but just then he blew his traffic signal and traffic was held up.

"Before the Cuban could turn in the other direction, Terry had dodged between cars and reached Hurley's side. 'Dope peddler!' he whispered—'nab him, for Gawd's sake, before he gets away!'

"Hurley left the crossing and jerked our bird off his perch. The hop head had already made his getaway. Sure enough, Terry had played in luck. There was enough dope on the Cuban to set a regiment out on a rampage, and a wad of bills as big as your fist.

"Hurley trotted him over here, handed him to the captain and Terry phoned me. Now it's up to us to get the rest of what we want to know out of the Cuban himself."

"Good work, Clancy."

Ward wrung the patrolman's hand.

"And where is this young Dolan person?"

"Terry? Sitting inside pleased as a Cheshire cat."

He pointed to a sandy-haired lad seated on a bench near the captain's desk who had been watching them with eager attention during Clancy's recital.

WARD crossed over to him and thanked him. Then he turned to the officer in charge and told him who they were and why they wanted to interview the prisoner.

"I understand," answered the official. "Go in there," pointing to an open door. "I'll be with you in a minute, and I'll have him brought in to you."

As he rose Ward detained him and, briefly shielding her as much as possible, explained about Dolores having left her home, and the necessity of finding her immediately.

He gave the other a complete description of her, the car and its driver and added that he had reason to believe that the car stopped by the Cuban's taxi was the Herndon car, and there might be a possibility of Mrs. Herndon's having been in it.

"I'll send a man around to the Arlington," the captain said brusquely.

His manner showed he knew Ward was withholding more from him than he gave him and that he resented it.

CHAPTER XX.

"THAT'S THE PARTY!"

MARGERY shivered at the malignancy in the Cuban's beady eyes as they stared for a split second at her, then shifted to the police captain, from him to Clancy and finally rested on Ward.

"Well," he muttered, breaking a silence that had lasted since the attendant had led him into the room, "what do you want wid me?"

He directed his question to Ward.

"I'm not interested in where you got your dope nor who is the one higher up in your ring," the physician answered quietly. "That I'll leave to the Federal authorities."

A sly smile twitched the man's full blood red lips.

"But I am interested in the lady you sold it to, and I want to know just why you murdered Anthony Herndon."

"Ward!" Margery gave a scream.

His finger closed on her forearm with a pressure that made her wince.

The Cuban stared at him with blinking amazement.

"Murdered. Say—jus'—jus' what do you mean?"

"You've been selling morphine to Mrs. Herndon for several years, haven't you?"

As the man remained silent, he repeated the question, then added, "You might as well admit it, for she has. She's given us full information concerning you."

"She always was the fool," muttered the man. "Well, I don't deny it. They found the stuff on me. If she want to buy—I want to sell."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But for why you say the murder? Why the murder to me?"

"Just why did you kill him?"

The man laughed.

"I not kill heem. You cannot scare with that. You're mos' as foolish as she is, eef you think you scare that way."

"But you know who did."

"No. I know nothin' about thees murder. Her I know—yes, very well—since she was the leetle girl—all the same age as me. We play together like the children. She become great dancer. Me jus' what I am. That's all."

"Oh, no it isn't. She gave you a roll of bills today when you met her at the Arlington Hotel."

Again the man laughed.

"You know so mooch. Maybe you know more than I do."

"You did meet her in front of the Arlington?"

"Perhaps yes—perhaps no. Maybe."

THE captain, who had been watching Ward with an amused glint in his slate-colored eyes, leaned forward.

"I'll handle him; I'm used to his stripe; you're not. Now look here, you. You're going to talk and talk pretty or there'll be more than a dope peddling charge against you. Get that straight."

"I've nothing to say."

"Make him tell who Shields is," Margery whispered to Ward. "You don't think he murdered father—— But get the truth from him about Shields and Dolores."

"In a minute, dear."

"Where did you get that money we found on you? Answer me. Did Mrs. Herndon give it to you?"

For two minutes or more the man refused to speak. At last he admitted that she had done so; admitted that he had turned over to her a thousand dollars worth of morphine less than two hours before.

"A thousand dollars! Oh, Ward!" Margery wailed.

"So she's peddling the stuff, too?" said the captain.

"Naw. She—goes away. Maybe it will be hard where she goes—to get it. She telephone me for to meet her. I do. She say bring all you 'ave. I do. That's the truth. That's all I know."

"Where's she going?"

"I dunno. Why should I ask? She nothing to me. What she do, I don't care. Her business, not mine. I keep still. Nevair talk, so——"

"Who's going with her?" Ward demanded.

"I dunno."

"Come on. Who's the man? You know he's her lover."

Ward bent so close that his face almost touched the swarthy countenance of the other.

Margery gave a little moan. She sat there a tense, quivering little figure. The floor seemed unsteady, to heave under her like the roll of a ship on an uneasy sea.

She was not conscious of what they were saying, just the mumble of words.

Suddenly her nerves jerked. She stiffened, pulling herself upright again. Only a telephone on a small table nearby. The bell had rung—ears acute again—all attention.

She saw the police captain cross to the telephone, take down the receiver, put it to his ear and heard him say, "Yeh?"

"Yeh! That's the party—yellow hair, dark eyes, slim; description tallies. And the man—eh—huh—Yes, fits him too. J. G. Burns and wife—uh—huh! Wait a minute."

HE placed the receiver on the desk and turned to Ward.

"Woman answering to description of Mrs. Herndon and a man description of her chauffeur are registered at the Arlington as J. G. Burns and wife. My man is in the hotel office, now."

"Registered as man and wife!"

Margery's sick cry burst in a sob from her lips.

Ward nodded grimly.

"Well, can't he arrest them and bring them around here?"

"Arrest them! Oh, Ward, daddy's widow?"

She tried to rise, but her knees

would not bear her weight and she dropped back in the chair, looking piteously at him.

"Sorry, dear. I wanted to spare you this. Shouldn't I send you home before they arrive? There'll be a scene, and I'd much rather you weren't here."

"Father—loved her," she quavered. "Will—they put her in there?"

She nodded toward the open door through which the stone corridor and the row of barred cells were plainly visible.

"I'd rather nothing further was ever known, Ward; not even who killed him. It's horrible. Somehow, I feel as if I couldn't endure it. Will they treat her as a common criminal —like that man?"

"You can't afford to be too sympathetic now, dear. Though I'll see to it that they are as easy on her as possible. Come, let me send you home."

"No. I've stood this much, I'll— I'd rather stay."

WHILE they were speaking the captain had finished his telephone conversation and now hung up the receiver with:

"Casey will bring them here. Moore"—to the attendant—"take that bird back to his cell. You've finished with him, haven't you, Doctor Gresham?"

"I didn't get very much information," Ward answered reluctantly.

"*Si!* I told you I know nothing!" the Cuban flung at him, "nothing!"

"I'm not finished with you," said the captain, "and by the time I have, you'll find out that you know a great deal!"

Cortez sniffed. He left the room with the same air of bravado that he had entered it.

At his exit Margery drew a deep sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XXI.

ENTER—NEW ORLEANS

MARGERY saw when her stepmother entered the room accompanied by an officer who held her by the arm, and the chauffeur Shields, now minus his uniform and dressed in quiet, good taste, that Dolores was so completely under the influence of drugs as to appear to suffer no humiliation, scarcely distress at her arrest.

Dolores looked about the room with great vacant dark eyes, recognized Margery and Ward with a bob of her head, and swayed drunkenly. Then she mumbled thickly:

"Didn't expect to see you here, Margery. Are you 'rested, too?"

The girl met her stare with silence.

The chauffeur's face was pallid. He seemed to be suffering. As Dolores lurched, he put his arm about her and kept it there.

There was something about the expression on his face that struck a chord of sympathy in Margery's heart; something that informed her this man truly loved the wreck of a woman beside him, and that his pain was because of her disgrace, not his own.

Whatever else Shields might be, it was quite evident that he was not a drug addict. He looked appealingly at the officer whose hand rested on Dolores' shoulder, and the man placed her in a chair.

The chauffeur thanked him with a faint twist of his lips.

Dolores sat there, smiling vaguely, her mouth twitching occasionally; now and then a light of comprehension passed over her beautiful features, then faded almost instantly.

"What's your name?"

The captain turned on Shields.

"James Burns."

"Real name?"

"Yes."

"Profession?"

"Everything, nothing. I have been employed as chauffeur for the Herndons for the past three months; but you might call me soldier of fortune—adventurer—anything."

He smiled wearily.

"Do you mind telling me why the lady and I are under arrest?"

"That'll come later."

"As you like."

He shrugged his shoulders, then suddenly he cried to Gresham:

"Doctor, for God's sake can't you do something? You're her physician. You see how she is. She can't stand a thing like this! She's all gone. I don't care a damn about myself, what you do with me—but take her away from here!"

"Why did you give her the dope then?" Ward asked coldly.

"Give it to her! Me! I'd cut off my hand before I'd do that! I can't do anything with her. It's got her too strong. If it hadn't been for the damn hop we'd been out of the city by now, where you couldn't have put your hands on us."

"What is this woman to you?"

The captain rapped the words at him.

Shields' shoulders stiffened. For a moment he looked at Dolores with indecision, then he said slowly:

"She's my wife."

"What!"

The ejaculation came from everyone in the room in various degrees of surprise.

"How long has she been your wife?" from the captain.

"I married her eight years ago in New Orleans."

Margery felt the world slipping; red lights danced before her eyes. With superhuman effort she kept control of herself.

"What's that?" Ward ejaculated. "Eight years? then——!"

"She was never Herndon's legal wife, if that's what you mean. There's no use denying anything now, even if I wanted to, which I don't. I'll be glad to get it off my chest; to come out in the open again. You'd get the story anyway, if you haven't already."

"There was a ceremony, wasn't there? She married Mr. Herndon?" said the doctor.

"Yes. She married him."

"You and she pulled the stunt to get the old man's money," snapped the captain, "and when he didn't die soon enough you bumped him off."

SHIELDS met his stare staunchly.

"No. I didn't 'bump him off,' as you call it. Maybe we did want his money, but we had nothing to do with his death."

Dolores seemed to realize what the accusation meant. She caught at the arm of the chair and pulled herself to her feet, the pupils of her eyes contracted to pin points, her hollow cheeks ashen gray.

"No! No!" she shrilled, "Jimmy didn't do it! Jimmy had nothing to do with it, with my marrying Anthony! Nothing to do with any of it! I did it all alone! D'ye hear? Alone!"

"Steady, girl," the chauffeur said soothingly. "They know I didn't do it. It's all right."

SHE sank back again and relapsed into the same vacant manner, content in his assurance, or oblivious to what was taking place about her.

"Where were you when this woman, your wife, married Herndon?" The captain bent forward, fixing his steely eyes on the man.

"New York. Arrived just the day before from abroad."

"You knew she was going to marry him?"

There was a hesitancy. The

opaque eyes wandered to the slumping woman huddled in the chair.

"No, I didn't know. If I had, perhaps I'd have put a stop to it; perhaps I wouldn't. I was dead broke and I like money as much as anyone. Maybe I'd have been tempted to say nothing. I don't know."

"Were you and your wife separated at the time?"

"No. She thought I was dead."

"You mean she thought you were dead at the time she married Herndon?"

"Yes."

The captain smiled.

"Old stuff, very old stuff. Enoch Arden has gone out of date."

"Well, it's true if it is old stuff. Look at her now! She's a wreck. If she keeps up at the rate she's going, she wont last a month. He knows it," nodding toward Ward.

"And do you know what caused it? The War! The damned rotten War that took me away from her just after we were married!

"She was only a kid, a little timid weak kid, without a relative in the world, and only a rotten paying job in the show, and she loved me. I loved her, too, but not like she did me.

"I was careless, got hard as nails seeing 'em all being kicked off around me over there. Didn't write often. Figured she was all right. Knew she'd worry, but—that was part of the game.

"Injured—invalided. Someone sent her word I was dying. That started her on the thing that's got her.

"I wrote when I got out of the hospital, but she never got the letter. On the front, prisoner—old stuff—yes—but hell just the same. No chance to let her know anything. Never heard from her. Months—a year—released. Still no word from her.

"The letters I wrote were returned. I was convinced she'd quit me like a lot of 'em did their boys when they were over there fighting for 'em. Never knew she thought I am dead.

"I hit the high spots then, ate up the bright lights of Paris; stuck around Montmartre till I wore out my welcome. Then I beat it back to the States and landed in New York a bum—soused all the time; ready for anything. The day after I arrived, I saw in the papers the story of Herndon's marriage to La Bonita.

"Millionaire—dilettante married to Spanish dancer. The picture looked like Dolores, and I put two and two together. She'd always been able to dance and had written she'd got an engagement in somebody's ballet. La Bonita wasn't Dolores Spindola—not the names, I mean; but names can be changed.

"I decided some rich guy had put her where she belonged; had given her a chance to make good on the stage; that she'd divorced me, and I let it go at that. I drank a little harder, that's all.

"One day," his voice thickened, "I bumped into a man who'd been a schoolmate of hers—a rotten beggar he was—but his father and hers had kept up a friendship till old Spindola died, and Dolores still had a liking for Enrico because of that."

"Enrico Cortez?" the captain interrupted.

"Yes. That was his name. I'd have dodged him if I could. But something in the way that he looked at me made me turn around and he recognized me. He seemed almost scared out of his skin; seems he thought he'd seen a ghost. Then he told me Dolores believed me to be dead.

"Then I knew she'd never divorced me; that she had married Herndon thinking that she had a right to."

DOLORES' head had dropped over on her shoulder by now, and her eyes were closed, her long inky lashes touching the curve of her cheek. Whether she heard what he said is doubtful, for her face was absolutely expressionless. Her lips parted like a child's in sleep.

"I'd spent months in the trenches," he went on in a dull monotone, "a year in a German prison, had been shot in the leg and suffered about as much as it seemed possible for a man to endure, but that night I went through a hell worse than any I'd ever been through.

"I didn't sleep, nor get drunk; just walked the streets until daybreak. I realized that I loved her more than I'd ever loved her and that I wanted her, like a man on the desert, thirsting for days, wants water.

"At first I was all for going right to her. Then I began to compare myself with the man she'd married—what I used to be and what I was now. I hadn't a thing to give her. I hadn't even a job. He was rich. Well—you know what he was.

"I fought it out that night. And by morning I'd made up my mind. She thought I was dead. All right, so far as she was concerned, I'd stay dead. There was little chance of her ever running into me now, being in the set she'd gone into, and me just a bum, doing odd jobs in a garage or any old place where I could pick up a dollar.

"But I never figured on Cortez; never dreamed that she ever met up with him since her marriage with Herndon. But she did and he told her the truth, that I wasn't only alive, but in New York."

He paused, his hands brown, muscular, gripped together.

"Well, go on."

"She found me. How, I don't know. Maybe through Cortez.

"She'd changed. It wasn't only the fine clothes she wore and the jewelry and car, but there was something else different about her that I didn't understand at first.

"Oh, she loved me still, and offered to leave him at once and come with me, but——"

"It was rotten. I'm not handing myself any medals for it. But as she sat there in that dirty crumbling old room of mine, with the wall paper peeling in tatters, roaches all over the sink, water dripping from the faucet in a way to drive you mad, torn rug on the floor, and grimy, greasy curtains at the window—looking like an orchid in a slimy pool—not overstrong—pale, thin—it came to me that if the old man was as old as she said he was and as rich, there was a way out for us without her ever coming down to this.

"SOMEHOW, I just couldn't let her come back to what I had to offer. A Ninth Avenue rooming house; dinner maybe, or maybe not; washing, scrubbing; or going back on the stage which she didn't look strong enough for; no future; nothing but poverty.

"Well, I told her to stick with him. It wouldn't be for always. She'd come into his money and then—that's all."

He finished abruptly.

"Not quite. You became Herndon's chauffeur?"

"Yes. I couldn't stand it away from her when I learned about the dope. I wanted to cure her; to be near her; help her. She got me the job, but I had no influence over her—no more than he had, Mr. Herndon, I mean.

"I got to like the old man, though it was torment to see him with her. I felt guilty as sin. He was so fine and trusting. I couldn't have told him the truth after I knew him."

For the first time his voice grew husky

"No, but you could kill him."

"I didn't. I've laid all of my cards on the table. Dirty cards, but no murder on them."

"She told you there was a hundred thousand dollars in the safe," said Ward slowly, "and you killed him to get it."

"A hundred thousand dollars!" incredulously. "A hundred thousand dollars! Anthony Herndon never kept a hundred dollars in the house!"

"You murdered Anthony Herndon," the captain leaned forward menacingly, "and took that money."

Opaque eyes met his unflinchingly.

"No. I did not. I can prove where I was every minute of that evening. But hold me on the charge, if you want to. I don't given a damn. But for God's sake don't keep her here! She'd die in a cell, and at least you know she's innocent."

His voice broke, and unmindful of the others he gathered the unconscious woman in his arms.

"If I go her bail," Margery said suddenly, "may I take her home with me?"

CHAPTER XXII.

SOMETHING TO DISCUSS

THERE were tears in Margery's eyes when Burns, the man she had known as Shields, bent over Dolores and kissed her before they led him away to his cell.

Tears rolled unheeded down her cheeks, and washed away all the bitterness and resentment she had felt against the woman who was insensible to the fact that her lover was under arrest for murder; and that she herself, if not detained under a charge of complicity in the crime, was due to face imprisonment for bigamy and intent to defraud, and having in her possession a large amount of narcotic.

But Ward Gresham knew, if the girl did not, that there was little chance for Dolores Herndon to ever face a court of justice. He wondered if she had deliberately taken an overdose of morphine at the time of her apprehension, or if shock and nerve exhaustion, added to her previous collapse, had placed her in her present condition.

She had not stirred at the pressure of the man's lips on hers. Nor did she move when Ward felt of her pulse, looked at her eyes, then lifting her in his arms carried her out to the machine parked at the corner.

Margery's check had bought her release, but the girl knew that although Dolores might be taken to the home where she was once the mistress, police would be stationed to see that she did not leave it.

Already the drugs left in the Arlington bedroom had been turned in at the station.

As they drove northward Ward told her of the finding of the second will, a will which would mean nothing, since Dolores had never been Herndon's legal wife.

"I shall see that she is cared for anyway, Ward," she said softly. "Daddy loved her. This will proves that he loved her more than he ever dreamed of loving me."

Her chin quivered.

"But how—how could he have done this to me? We never quarreled and —there was never an unkind word between us."

"Don't take it to heart, dear. Perhaps there is something more than you know behind it."

"Mr. Seddon may explain when he comes tonight," she said, "but it—it seems so unfair, when I loved him so."

Ward carried the sleeping woman to the apartment she had left early that morning, placed her on the bed; and after saying as little as possible

to the astounded nurse, gave her a few instructions and went out.

He had left Clancy, who had accompanied them, in the library with Margery. But when he joined the two, Ward insisted that the girl go to her room and lie down, also.

She looked completely exhausted and, as it still lacked an hour until dinner would be served, he hoped that she might sleep and for the time being relax.

Also, he wanted to be alone with Clancy. He was curious at the patrolman's coming with them without an invitation to do so, and was certain it was because Clancy had something to discuss with him.

He was not aware that Clancy had the second will in his possession and in a measure would have liked to have postponed the interview. He felt inexpressibly weary.

The fast moving current of events had shaken him more than he realized until he had reached Herndon Hall. Now he suddenly was acutely conscious of having gone without luncheon, of feeling limp and "all in."

"YOU must think I'm butting in, Doctor," Clancy said, breaking the silence after watching the physician's thoughtful face for some minutes, "but I thought you might be interested in reading the will, and that you'd rather do it without the young lady present."

"The will? As a matter of fact I had forgotten all about it, Clancy."

"No wonder."

"You have it with you?" in surprise.

"Yes."

He took the paper from his pocket and extended it.

"Why, how did you come to have it? I supposed Seddon still had it."

Clancy grinned.

"Took no chances of Seddon's destroying it."

"He'd hardly do that, now that we know of its existence. After all, the lawyer only did what he fancied was the right thing by the daughter of his old friend."

"Yeh."

Clancy stretched his feet out before the open fireplace, his blue eyes squinting as they watched the little flames shoot out and blaze higher.

"Strange about this will," said Ward, shaking out the paper. "I never believed that Anthony Herndon would do a thing like this to his only child. Until his meeting with Dolores he was exceedingly fond of Margery—as devoted to her as a man of his peculiar temperament could be of a daughter."

"Never can tell about anyone," mused Clancy. "When an old man gets infatuated with a young girl she can do just about what she pleases with him."

"Herndon had too strong a character to be twisted around a woman's thumb."

"A woman can change a man's character," Clancy philosophized. "They've been known to make crooks out of men honest all their lives, before."

THE fire crackled and spit. Clancy lifted a poker and jabbed at a log, but as he straightened he glanced at the doctor's face. It was drawn in a puzzled manner.

"Clancy, just what do you make of this clause?"

With his forefinger he touched a line half-way down the centre of the page.

"Which one?"

"You read the will, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And nothing in it struck you as strange?"

The patrolman smiled.

"The whole thing struck me as strange."

"But this: *To my daughter, Margery, I bequeath everything I have locked in the wall safe behind the panel—to do with as she sees fit, to burn or have published.* Do you suppose that means only his manuscripts, or by any possible chance the money that was placed there?"

"Well, since you've asked me I think it means the money. He deeded the house and everything else to his wife and intended maybe that only his daughter should know about the money, and stated it in his will in such a manner that the wife would not get wise and yet the daughter would be protected."

"But he only received the money the night he died, and this will is dated almost a month before."

"Yeh, but he knew he was going to have the money, didn't he? He made the deal with the Spaniard before this will was drawn up. I'll wager dollars to doughnuts that he was going to tell Miss Herndon about that transaction, and how he had provided for her, if he hadn't been shot down before it happened."

"And you think he never intended his wife to inherit more than the home and what properties he still possessed?"

"Certain of it."

"That would indicate that—that he didn't altogether trust her or—that he wasn't quite so infatuated as we have thought."

"Yeh."

Clancy's expression was ambiguous.

"Did Seddon make any remark about this clause?"

"Seddon!" Clancy laughed heartily. "He wasn't in any mood to make remarks on anything. I'd scared him stiff."

"Just what made you think he had the will?"

"Well, you're always talking about playing hunches, Doctor, and as I've had a few, I decided to follow one where Seddon and the will were concerned."

"Mr. Seddon," Annie announced in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXIII

IMPULSE

THERE was a little hesitancy in the lawyer's manner as he accepted Ward's hand and stepped into the room, an embarrassment plainly visible when he saw Clancy's stalwart figure by the fireplace. He coughed, fidgeted with his gloves, then put them in the pocket of his overcoat and handed the coat and his hat to Annie.

"Well," he said at length, "I suppose you are tabulating me as all kinds of a scoundrel, Ward?"

The doctor smiled.

"Not exactly, Mr. Seddon. Though I'm wondering how you, as clever as you are, ever expected to hide the existence of a document like this."

"I doubt if I gave it much thought."

His eyes shifted uneasily toward Clancy.

"It was an impulse; purely an impulse. Ever since Anthony made it, it has worried me, I'll admit; but as for withholding it, it would never have occurred to me to—even think of doing so if—if—the copy had been found in the safe."

"Hardly possible to have done so, under those circumstances," Ward returned dryly.

Before he could make any reply, Margery came into the room.

"Annie told me you were here, Mr. Seddon," she said, giving him her hand. Has Ward told you what has happened today? Seddon glanced toward Ward.

"She doesn't know about the will."

"Yes, I know, Mr. Seddon. You're

a dear to try to do this for me, but it was—oh, you foolish old darling—don't you know you couldn't do it; that it was impossible to hide it with a clever detective like Clancy out after clues?"

She linked her arm through the old man's and half forced him into a chair.

"You mean you've discovered something of importance?"

"We've discovered that—you tell him, Ward."

"Dolores was never Mr. Herndon's legal wife."

"What!" Seddon half rose from the chair, then dropped back again.

"She was already the wife of a young man who connived with her not only in this bigamous marriage, but to secure Herndon's fortune!"

"My God! Married!"

The yellow skin on the lawyer's face had become ashen gray.

"A young man—married!"

"And the man was Shields, her chauffeur. Shields is now under arrest charged with the murder of Herndon and the theft of one hundred thousand dollars taken from that safe."

"Hundred thousand dollars," Seddon murmured after him.

"And"—Clancy abruptly swung around from the fireplace and faced the lawyer—"Mrs. Herndon is under arrest as an accomplice in the crimes."

"Mrs. Herndon—Dolores—my God—no!"

"Yes. Mr. Seddon, did you know that Anthony Herndon contemplated selling his Murillos at the time that will was made; that the money made from the sale was to be given to his daughter, Margery, and was to be placed among his papers in the safe?"

Clancy's question was in reality a statement.

"No—I—I—"

There was a sick, tortured look in the lawyer's eyes.

"Dolores—not his wife—I can't believe it."

"You did know," Clancy said slowly. "You knew it when that clause 'to my daughter Margery I bequeath everything in the wall safe,' was written. You knew that meant money, cash money, not a lot of worthless sheets of paper. Didn't you?"

"No. I—I—never dreamed I—. Where is Dolores? I want to see her. I want to talk to her. She—she—good God! She—she had nothing to do with the murder. Is she here or—or—"

Seddon staggered to his feet, his knees quivering under him.

CLANCY sprang to the door, which stood open. He placed a hand on either side, facing the lawyer.

"No!" he cried, "she had nothing to do with the murder. No one had anything to do with the murder but you, John Seddon.

"While everyone but the butler was away from the house you entered with a key you possessed, shot Anthony Herndon, and robbed his safe, taking a will whose existence you intended to keep unknown because this clause was all there was to indicate anything of value had ever been in that safe!"

Stunned by his words, Margery stood absolutely motionless, but Ward was smiling grimly.

Seddon seemed to crumple, his body sunken in like a deflated balloon. He stared in horror—amazement into the hard eyes of the young officer. He tried to speak, but only a gurgle came from his pallid lips.

"Seddon, I arrest you for the murder of Anthony Herndon."

As Clancy put his hand on the attorney's shoulder, he writhed, gave a strangled cry and tried to break away.

"No use, Seddon; we've got the goods on you! You might as well come clean with the whole story."

Clancy half threw the trembling, ashen-faced man across the room, slammed the door and locked it.

"You were in love with Herndon's wife, weren't you?"

No reply.

"You wanted her from the first day you met her. You figured if Herndon could win her, you could win her from him—money would buy her.

"You weren't a rich man, but daily you were growing richer. You negotiated Herndon's sale of his property, and most of the money derived from the sales went in your pockets. Herndon was an easy man to rob, immersed in his books, worried about his wife, trustful of you.

"You suggested to him selling those paintings, when he needed money. *You* urged him to deed everything to his wife. It made you stronger with her if you were able to tell her you'd done this for her.

"Had she promised to elope with you, Seddon? No—promised to marry you then at Herndon's death? Hem, I thought so. And you couldn't wait, could you?

"Rather a knockout, isn't it, to learn that the lady had been stringing you all the time and never intended to give herself to you, as she was in love with a young man."

Seddon slumped in a chair facing his denouncer. He was livid, every tortured feature a confession of guilt. He was incapable of either admitting or denying anything Clancy said.

"*You* cut the telephone wires after eating your victim's bread! You watched your chance as he left the dining room. It was easy to do, under pretense of putting in a call.

"You sent the phoney message to Annie about her sick mother; but you overlooked Hayes, or could find no excuse to get him out of the way; probably figured he'd be in bed. Was that it, Seddon? Effectual disguise, the motor-cap—beard—dark corridor—frightened butler. You almost got away with it only——"

"How — how — did you know?" burst from the pallid lips.

"You should have stayed just a little longer and made certain this was burned."

From his pocket Clancy drew a charred piece of leather and a scrap of paper. "Not much to work on, but they set me thinking. The words, 'daughter Margery' — and again 'thousand dollars'—I found these at the edge of the fireplace after Miss Herndon brought me here."

"And that," interposed Ward in explanation to Margery, "was what made me engage Clancy. He did not show them to the police, but to me."

"The last one to be suspected—always the criminal," Clancy threw over his shoulder, "my motto, doctor. You might as well confess, Seddon, and slip your hands in these bracelets."

CHAPTER XXIV

EVERYTHING'S COVERED

THE death of the woman whose beauty and lure had made him a murderer and thief unsealed Seddon's lips. He confessed everything, the details of his statement very similar to the way Clancy had outlined the way the crime had been committed.

He had known of the transaction with the Spaniard, known that Herndon intended the money for Margery, and had induced his client to keep it in his safe until *he* could invest it.

Herndon had written a letter to Margery telling her that the money was intended for her and had placed

the letter in his safe. And that letter Seddon had burned in the fireplace along with the wallet in which the money had been placed.

But the sound of Hayes' footsteps had made him hurry away before either was completely destroyed. Two half-sentences had damned him.

Clancy had, during the week previous, learned that Dolores had lunched many times with the lawyer, and, realizing her magnetism, figured the man past middle age susceptible to women and flattery might easily be influenced by her beauty; might fall madly in love with her.

Everything Seddon did from that hour had been covered. And Clancy was practically sure of his man when he threw his bluff at him in the library.

Both the Cuban and Shields were serving their sentences when Margery and Ward were married, the former in a Federal prison, the latter a shorter term for his complicity in the bigamous marriage with an attempt to obtain money from Herndon. But Seddon's fate still hung in the balance.

The young doctor wished the girl to have the protection of his name before the sentence of death was pasted upon the man who had been her father's friend. For, regardless of what he had done, at one time she had been fond of Seddon and the knowledge of what would be his fate was certain to be a shock.

JERRY LANCASTER was best man at the wedding. The only witnesses were Dennis Clancy and Maggie Quinn. And as Ward slipped a slender platinum band on Margery's finger, Maggie's eyes looked down at her own little fist where an inconspicuous diamond sparkled, placed there the day before by a blushing confused young amateur detective.

THE END

The Warning Double

In Ireland the spectral image of oneself, or double, was called a Fetch. It was sometimes an apparently material replica, but more often a mere shadow, resembling in stature, features and dress the living person.

If it appeared to anyone in the morning, it was a sign of long life; but if seen in the evening foretold the early death of its living prototype. If it acted in an agitated manner or was eccentric in its behavior, a violent or painful death was in store. It usually appeared to a friend of the man or woman at a time when the doomed person was sick in bed.

Sometimes the one about to die beheld his own double. One of the most noted instances is that of the French author Maupassant. Coming home one night he was amazed to see himself seated busy at his desk. The sight was a forerunner of the madness which was to overtake him. He died in an insane asylum.

Mock House

By GRACE LOVELL BRYAN

LARS PEDERSON, known throughout the countryside as "that Swedish peddler," clucked to the two horses attached to his creaking wagon laden with kitchen-ware, toys, etc., which was Lars' stock in trade, and from his place on the wagon seat patted the front of his heavy woolen shirt, inside of which was carefully sewed fifteen one thousand dollar bills.

He had drawn it from the bank at Galva, on his way to Osco; his savings of twenty years. Now he was going back to Sweden.

From Osco he would board a train for Chicago en route to New York and the steamer. Then, he would settle down in the little village that had been his birthplace, a rich man after all his years of toil, and he would tell great tales of the new country of America.

He gave an exclamation of alarm as he glanced at the sky. A storm was coming up surely. Already gusts of wind flecked extra color into his high cheek bones and swayed the ends of his long taffy-colored mustache. In another moment rain spattered against his face.

He wanted to reach Osco before it rained, for he was selling his stock to Olaf Gustafson for a hundred dollars, which would be added to the sum inside his shirt. He had hoped to deliver his goods that afternoon. There was only a thin covering over them, and water would damage them without doubt.

Olaf was a tight bargainer, with eyes sharpened by years of trading into sighting defects, and he must not lose that hundred.

Lars swore softly as the rain began coming down in heavy drops. Chickens ran fluttering across the road, scuttling to shelter; a dog barked in the distance. Already it was five o'clock and dusk, for it was early Spring, so that it was dark as night, and everyone seemed to have hurried inside to avoid a deluge. Well, he had better turn in somewhere.

Ahead of him was a big Colonial house of three stories that shone dimly white in the darkness. It was the Mock place; Bill Mock and his wife and two children. He had dealt occasionally with Mrs. Mock, who had bought but little, however.

Lars had heard it said that Bill was bad-tempered; that he had been drinking heavily, and that the place was mortgaged and about to be sold to pay off a growing indebtedness; but Lars didn't repeat gossip.

He guided the horses through an open gate into the driveway that led to the house. Through the windows he could see lights, the rays falling across the roadway from a red and green globe on the table in the dining-room.

With a loud "Whoa!" Lars brought the creaking wagon to a standstill under a tree that kept off most of the rain. The horses shook themselves, and the creaking ceased into a faint jingle.

HASTENING to the kitchen door, he knocked. Lars took off his cap as the door was opened by Mrs.

Mock. The short squat figure of Bill Mock lounged in a chair near a window, his stockinged feet resting on the sill.

He was a red-faced man with leathery skin and gnarled, thick hands resting on his knees. A brown shirt open at the throat made his neck look like that of a turkey gobbler's.

He turned small black eyes and stared at Lars in a dull, faintly menacing silence.

"Excuse, Missus," Lars explained ingratiatingly. "Aye tink de wagon get wet yust terr'ble before Aye get to Osco, so Aye tink if Aye could yust stop——"

"Why, yes," she returned hesitatingly.

She put a hand to her graying hair, adjusted a straggled lock and stepped aside for him to enter, glancing over her shoulder at her husband. Her eyes looked swollen as though she had been crying. She did not close the door.

"He can put his wagon in the barn, can't he?"

She was addressing Mock.

"Naw!"

The man in the chair sat upright suddenly; the knuckles of his hands grew white over the chair arm.

"Yuh damned fool! What'd you think you're givin' anyhow, a free livery barn? Get out, Svenska."

"But, Bill!" expostulated Mrs. Mock, "he——"

"What did I tell you!" he snapped. "Are ye deef?"

His red face grew suddenly mottled with anger and he half rose from the chair.

"Nay, nay, Aye go," interposed Lars hastily. "Excuse, Missus."

He backed out onto the doorsill.

"You see Aye go back to Sweden tomorrow, and Aye want to go to Osco."

"Back to Sweden!" exclaimed Mrs. Mock, in surprise. "Well, Lars, after all these years! Why it wont seem like things without you stopping by each Spring. I allus say I wonder if Lars will be by again. I guess it's purty long you been comin'. Got folks over there?"

"No, nobody any more, yust some cousins left out of de fam'ly. De mutter and fader all dead. No folks in dis country neider to miss ol' Lars."

"Leaving soon?"

"Yah."

Lars' wide face opened in a grin.

"All ready. Aye go to Osco tonight and buy ticket. Go New York City in de morning; den mebbe ten days, two weeks, I be ol' country."

He nodded rapidly many times.

"Yah. Good-by."

"Well, good-by, Lars. Sorry to see you go."

Mrs. Mock seemed trying to make amends. Lars turned away.

"Say!"

It was Bill Mock. Lars stared at him in surprise. His head with its sparse sandy hair was turned toward him, his mouth opened in a grin. He rose from his chair with a feline gesture that belied his heavy bulk and came forward genially.

"Leavin' us, eh? Oh, well, that's different."

Instead of his surly growl, there had come into his voice almost a silken quality.

"That's a horse of another color, that is, Lars! Why, of course you can stop here outa the wet. I was only kiddin' yuh!"

He put an arm about Lars' shoulders, patted his back, drawing him inside as he shut the door.

"Think I'd put a man off like that? Sure I wouldn't. Not me. You just go unhitch them horses and stop as long as yuh like. Well—*you!*"

This last was for his wife in a surly tone. Lars noticed she was

looking at her husband with dilated eyes. Her face had grown deadly pale. Her breast rose and fell over her calico waist as though in the throes of some unwelcome emotion.

WITH an exclamation Mock turned from her.

"Better put yer team up; we're gonna eat soon in this house." He addressed Lars:

"Oh, yah. Tanks!" Lars returned.

For a moment he had felt mystified, but it seemed all right. And his goods were saved.

Perhaps they would offer him supper, too. Then afterward he could drive on, sleep in his wagon somewhere in the village, and be on hand bright and early next morning for the sale to Olaf. It was kind of Mock, after all.

"I'll go with you, Lars, to be sure you find everything," said Mock.

The two went out, and Lars led the horses into the barn, unhitched them and rubbed them dry by the light of a lantern that hung over the paling; then led them into a vacant stall.

"Give 'em plenty of oats now. Don't stint nothin' in this house," Mock commanded.

He leaned against a shaft leading to the haymow as he talked, watching Lars as he poured feed into the manger.

"The sky's the limit. Say, going back to the old country? Well, that's fine. Got a sweetheart over there, I bet?"

Lars blushed. "Nay!"

"Aw, now, can't tell me. Well, she's gonna do purty well when she says the word, I'll bet yuh. Why, after all the time you've spent in this country, Lars, you'd oughta have quite a pile. You Swedes are a thrifty people. Well, that's the way to be, all right. You'll be a reg'lar millionaire over there!"

He laughed genially.

"Well, you've deserved it, I guess, the way you've worked."

He came forward, as Lars finished, chuckling.

"I'll tell you, Lars; we'll celebrate a little tonight; celebrate yer future wedding. What'd yuh say?"

He poked Lars in the ribs.

"Yah," Lars agreed, laughing.

As the two returned to the house, Mrs. Mock was setting the table, taking down the dishes from an oak cupboard in one corner of the kitchen and laying them on the red cloth of the centre table, opening cupboard drawers for knives and forks. When she started out with a water pail, Lars intercepted her, reaching for the pail.

"Oh, thank you, Lars."

He noticed her hands were trembling as she held it out. He went through the rain, let down the iron bucket into the well, then turned the crank that drew it up with a creaking of the well chains and poured it into his pail. When he had set it down in a corner of the kitchen, he got out his pipe.

"Supper's ready," Mrs. Mock announced presently.

Mock lounged to the table and sat down, sprawling in his chair, his elbows over the cloth. Lars sat across from Bill.

"Yes, sir, gonna give yuh a good send-off, anyhow, Lars," Mock said beamingly. "T'ain't so often us country folks meets anybody going to Europe, and we're gonna make the best of it!"

During the meal of fried eggs, potatoes and tea, Lars noticed that Mrs. Mock ate little. Her hands wandered to her hair, kept moving things about the table as though unconscious of what she was doing.

"Quit fidgeting, can't yuh?" Mock snarled at her.

She did not answer. The Mock

children were visiting their uncle in Orion, twelve miles distant, so Lars did not see them. But Bill made up for the silence of his wife by cordial loquacity, and Lars answered in kind with his usual cheerfulness and humor.

Draining his cup of tea, Mock wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and pushed back his chair. From a black walnut stand that served as sideboard he brought out a jug of whisky.

"Here's to you!" He poured out two cupfuls, handing one to Lars. "Put that under yer belt for bon voyage, as the Frenchies say, eh, Lars?"

"Oh, yah."

Lars grinned, taking the cup and holding it to Mock's.

"Taksamicka."

"Sure. Smart guy like you deserves none but the best, I'll say."

THIS was something like, Lars thought contentedly. He was glad he was not out in the wet and cold. Rain was beating against the window panes and running down in little rivers. The sound of it came lullingly from the roof above their heads.

The room with its gleaming cutlery and yellow dishes on the red cloth was pleasant; a hardcoal base burner from the room beyond glowed through isinglass windows, casting varicolored lights upon the bare floor. It was warm, a contrast to the chill outside and the drenching moisture on the glass.

"Swell booze this is."

Bill's voice sounded afar off, but it was warm with good feeling and cheer. Mock was one good fellow.

"Yah. *Feen som snoose,*" Lars chuckled. "Aye thank it ban best booze what is."

"Well, then, just you put another away for keeps, since you're going on such a long trip." He refilled Lars' cup. "Well, you done well, Lars, and you'd oughta enjoy life and settle down while you're young, eh?"

Lars grinned, feeling suddenly exhilarated. People would point to him in awe when he got back to the old country, and the Lutheran minister to whom he had repeated his catechism would beam admiringly upon him and say: *"Gut poika, gut poika."* A rich man! But he was wise, too, and careful, even though he drank a little whisky.

"Yaah, you're a clever feller, you are, Lars."

"Oh, nay, not so gut," Lars said, deprecatingly.

Bill's face was red and wreathed with smiles. Lars laughed to himself. It was delicious; his secret.

He turned to Mrs. Mock, but she had disappeared. He was astonished, for he hadn't noticed her going. But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered except that at last he was going home. Tears filled his eyes at the thought of the years he had been away.

"Half-past nine a'ready. Didn't know it was that late."

It was Bill. He was leaning over, pointing to a chest of drawers in a corner.

The carved clock on it had long brass weights that you wound up. What had Bill said about it? Oh, yes. Late. That meant that he must be moving on—Osco, and Olaf Gustafson. He laid his hands on the arm of his chair reluctantly to rise.

"We got a bed for you, up third floor. Nice and comfortable; so you just stay here."

Lars took his hands from the chair arm and relaxed again in relief. It was an awful night. A peal of thunder clove the air. He could hear the water running madly from the eaves. Besides, plenty of time tomorrow.

He turned his head to Bill. He had risen and was opening a cupboard drawer, fumbling in it.

Lars got up, steadying himself by a chair. He felt light and mellow.

"Well, c'mon, old hoss!" said Bill.

He seemed exhilarated. He thrust an arm in Lars', took up a lamp with the other. Holding it up, its rays lighted the dim hallway outside. They began the ascent of the wide stairway. Lars grasped the rounds of the bannister for support.

A peculiar clicking sound was heard, like that made by a small boy pulling a stick against a fence. It came from a wooden handle of something that protruded from Bill's pocket. With every step it touched the partitions of the railing. A landing. Still up. The third floor attic room.

As he climbed dreams filled Lars' head. Little Helga, with her yellow hair and the roses in her cheeks. He had written to the old home and the Pastor had answered that she was still unwed. When Lars went back he would ask her to be his wife.

They reached the third floor. Bill pushed open a door, setting down the lamp on a table.

"Here y'are."

He was out of breath.

A single bed loomed in the shadow of the wall like a white ghost. At the head of the bed Lars made out a battered alarm clock on a stand.

"Yah. Aye set clock—five o'clock," he announced. "Aye get going soon."

"Sure, you will."

Lars felt immeasurably happy. He took out his mouth organ from his pocket and sat down on the bed, playing a wedding march—the wedding of Lars and little Helga. He laughed up at Bill Mock whose face wavered in the shadowy room.

Bill lurched toward him. And he, too, laughed.

EVE WILBUR alighted from the train, and stared about her a moment in eager delight. A handful of idlers on the station platform gaped at the car windows. Across the tracks a vista of frame houses had thriving lawns and colored patches of flower gardens.

A few folk alighted with her, to be greeted by waiting Fords and buggies.

Eve saw her husband coming toward her, and adjusted her trim hat as they kissed and he took her bag.

"Hello, honey. Glad to see you," he smiled.

"Same here, Jerry. Are you all settled?"

"Yep. Bought a car, too; cheap. Needed one for the farm, y'know. It's right over there."

"Oh, isn't it glorious, Jerry! I can't imagine it yet," she laughed as they drove down the street past the station and a line of brick stores that constituted the main street, toward the country road. "Our own home. Think of it! And we didn't pay as much for it as the land alone would be worth, did we?"

"No," said Jerry. "But then it had lain vacant ten years, the agent said, so I suppose that had something to do with it. It sure was a bargain. There was a lot of repairing and fixing up to do—and talk about weeds! Like no one had been here for a century!"

"Is it all right now?"

"Yep. Bertie and I put everything in order. The only thing, though, is that the house has no cellar. Not the best thing for a building to set right on the ground that way. I expect you'll find it damp sometimes, especially the kitchen.

"There's nothing between its board floor and earth. But tell you what I'm going to do. Next April when we get that ten thousand dollars coming to me from father's estate, I'm going to

raise the house and put a foundation under it.

"It will mean more money to us if we ever want to sell the place. And give you a place to store canned fruit and things."

"I suppose that would be a good idea."

"Got to do it," he stated. "If we want to stay."

"Well, we certainly do, don't we?"

"Of course."

"I should have come on with you to help you get settled," she remarked, patting her brown hair in place; "but that typing had to be finished at the office before I could give up my job.

"But now—oh, it seems too wonderful to be true. Our own place—after twelve years of living in a cramped city apartment. A big Colonial mansion, you said, Jerry. Is it marvelous?"

"Quite."

His tone was even without enthusiasm. She glanced at him and saw that his face was set; also, he did not return her glance.

"Why, what's the matter, Jerry?" she asked. "You sound uninterested."

"Oh, no, not at all. Bertie's at school," he went on. "Started Monday."

"Oh, yes. I'm crazy to see him." She sat thinking of the boy.

AS THE house came into view Eve sat staring at it. A large three-story house, once painted white, framed by huge old maples and white birch that rose majestically like sentinels. It sat somewhat low on the ground, she noted.

But that would be all right when Jerry had carried out the plan of raising the house. An old garden at the rear was overgrown with sunflowers and tall hollyhocks gone to seed. A barn sat at some distance from the house, connected by a wide roadway with it.

Jerry got out of the car and ran to open the gate.

"Oh, it's lovely, Jerry. Aren't you wild about it!"

Eve sighed ecstatically as she jumped out. She clapped her hands like a little girl. Jerry had to laugh.

"Of course," he said.

A wide stairway ran to the upper floors. The high-ceilinged rooms had quaint little steps in unexpected places leading into little alcoves. On the third floor the rooms were bare. They had not had enough money to furnish them.

"We wont know what to do with all the rooms we have fixed up," Eve laughed.

She went over everything, moved things about, adjusted things to suit her better, singing as she did so. How she would love everything about the place, even the funny little town with its sprinkling of houses, and the pretentious comic opera fire department she had seen as they passed by; its toy size engine painted bright red and gleaming in the sun. Not a street car to go clammering by, nor an elevated with its hideous confusion of crowding humanity. It was heavenly.

At half-past four the boy, Bertie, dashed in, whooping, his curly head bare of his cap. He flung his school books down joyfully at sight of his mother.

"Bertie!" she hugged him tightly. "Glad to see mother?"

"Sure," he grinned. "Gee, I thought you were never coming."

She thought he seemed relieved at sight of her.

"Seemed long to me, son, too," she said tenderly.

She kissed him again because he had missed her.

"Having a good time?"

"All right. But the fellows are

hicks, though. Some of 'em's never been to Chicago."

"But isn't your new home wonderful, Bertie!" she exclaimed.

She saw his face fall, and was astonished. Also she noted that he instantly endeavored to hide his expression.

"Oh, sure," he returned cheerfully. "It's great."

"Why don't you like it, son?" she asked curiously. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. That is—well, I like it all right. The yard's swell," he continued animatedly. "I could fix up a ball diamond in the front, couldn't I?"

He was busy fixing the braid on his cap.

Oh, well. The usual inability of children to visualize as grownups had. What the new home meant to Bertie was only the yard, big enough to play outdoors, not the house itself nor the fact of their first real home. She herself could scarcely keep from dancing as she thought how happy they were going to be.

WHEN she woke next morning from a dreamless sleep, Jerry asked her how she slept.

"Fine," she smiled. "Like a log, I guess."

"I was up once to shut a window. Thought you might have heard me."

He was fixing a door latch as he spoke.

"Oh, no; I didn't hear anything until the birds chirped this morning. Oh, it's so wonderful! I believe I'll drive into town this morning and get some things at the store," she announced. "Want to see the town and get acquainted."

"All right. I'll be out on that west field anyway and see how the land is for planting corn."

She felt like loving everything and everybody as she drove in with the Ford to town, past other farm houses that were not to be compared with their own home for beauty of architecture; past sloping meadows on which red and black spotted cattle grazed, with here and there an occasional flock of sheep that did not even raise their noses in the air at the spectacle of spinning autos racing past them, or horse-drawn vehicles jogging stolidly on.

She stopped before the pretentious department store. The proprietor, a ruddy-faced man, German in appearance, stared at her with frank curiosity as she made her purchase.

She told him they had come to live in town and had bought the Mock place three miles distant.

He stared at her in amazement.

"De Mock house?"

The ruddy color receded from his face and his jaw sagged. The intensity with which he spoke seemed all out of proportion to the words.

"Why, yes. Why not?" she answered.

"Oh, notting, notting," he returned hastily. "Sure, a nice place."

He nodded several times as though anxious to erase the effect of his former agitation.

"Sure. You got family, too?"

She told him she had a boy.

"Sure. You send public school mebbe. Osco got fine schools. My Katie she graduate last year from de senior school and now she work in Hanson's Millinery Shop already."

He beamed. But she noted that he kept looking at her with a solemn face.

She went out, feeling strangely chilled. What was the matter? Funny. What got into him? But probably he was simply surprised that city people had come to live there and go to farming.

As she went down the street with her purchases she glanced back over her shoulder and saw the figure of

the department store proprietor standing on the walk in front of his store with another man. They were looking toward her and talking animatedly.

Eve flushed. But it was silly to feel embarrassed. She had read of the curiosity displayed by country folk toward strangers. One really ought to feel flattered that there was any notice taken of one, instead of meeting with the stolid indifference of the city.

At the nearest grocery she stopped to get provisions.

A man entered the store soon after and sauntered back of the counter. Eve looked at him and was quite positive it was the man who had been talking with the storekeeper.

He whispered casually to the grocery clerk. Then he, too, stared in her direction with open mouth, and she saw the clerk beckon to another and say something under his breath.

The air was filled with tension; although when she met the clerk's eye steadily, he grew flustered and began to talk hurriedly about the weather. But she felt that he was impatiently waiting for her to go.

They were talking about her, as though in consternation or alarm. Yes, she was sure of that. What on earth was the matter?

She finished her buying and went nervously out. The mention of the Mock place had brought it about. But why?

As she drove home again she felt a sense of perturbation that the soft breeze against her face failed to disperse. What was wrong with the Mock house, that it created such interest? She would like to ask, but she knew no one, and would not break through her natural reserve to accost a stranger.

Her tension vanished, however, as she neared the big white house lying within the trees, its green shutters framing windows that glistened with sunlight.

It looked as cool and unfrightening as a huge old dog sleeping amiably with his head upon his paws. Pride of its possession made her sweep away all doubt or nervousness.

A cloud of gnats rose from the roadway. The stillness was penetrated only by the rustle of leaves as the wind surged through the trees and the hum of insects in the grass. A distant clucking of hens sounded from somewhere; a horse and buggy passed behind them on the road.

As she drove through the open gate she saw that two women in the buggy were staring at her with their mouths open. Out of the corner of her eyes she saw their faces, like white spots against the black hood as they leaned out to look back at her.

She thought she discerned on their faces the same look the shopkeeper had shown when told she lived in the Mock house.

Suddenly, she felt a sensation of fear.

Fear? A cold chill came over her, touched her nerves, but she dismissed it instantly. She was imagining things, that was all.

Of what was there to be afraid? She was getting jumpy. The stillness of the country, the absence of roar and noise to which she was accustomed made her unduly on edge.

"Jerry, what do you think?" she began as Jerry reached her from the house, ready to put the car in the barn for her. "I had quite an experience in town!"

She proceeded to relate the remarks of the storekeeper, his actions and those of the grocery clerk.

Jerry's face clouded, then brightened instantly. He laughed easily.

"Don't pay any attention to gossip. Small towns are full of it. Doesn't mean anything."

"Of course it doesn't. I wont think of it any more."

In an effort to throw it off she gave a vivid description of the scenery.

But as evening came on she noticed that Bertie grew silent. Even the golf club he had brought with him with which he had been wont to practice earnestly every evening was not brought out. He was restless; sat on the edge of his chair.

Jerry plunged into the *Chicago Tribune* he had brought from town, but from time to time he glanced up at her. She caught him looking at her with an odd expression, which instantly vanished.

"What's the matter, honey?" she asked.

"Nothing," he returned.

"Time for bed, Bertie. Nine o'clock," she told him. (He slept in the room next to theirs.)

Jerry rose instantly.

"I'll go up with him," he said, "to see he doesn't get lost. House is so darned big."

Eve did not remark as the two left the room. It was unusual for Bertie to balk at going by himself, for he was a sturdy chap, independent beyond his nine years, and in constant horror of being called a "sissy."

But now it almost seemed as though he were afraid of something.

She smiled at herself, trying to dismiss the thought. It was absurd. What could there be of terror in this big house, the soothing grandeur of it that pleased the eye?

There was so much to think of now. She gave herself up to it—Jerry out of an office, back to the land, themselves owners, not renters; part of the very soil. It was glorious.

She rose to go to bed. There was nothing else to do in the country. In Chicago they seldom stayed home.

EVE woke suddenly. The noise of something came to her, a distant clattering. Yes, the sound was distinct; she was not dreaming. She stared into the darkness, listening in a kind of panic. The wide hall with its stairway made a well that carried all sound upward. The sounds seemed to come from the direction of the kitchen.

Her flesh grew prickly; little shivers ran over her. What was it—what could it be? Jerry was beside her; it could not be Bertie.

She crept close to Jerry, pressing his side. He woke.

From below came a sound as though some object was being drawn across the floor, with the squeaking of casters; then the clink of dishes piled against each other; the rattle of cutlery, the opening and shutting of drawers.

"Somebody's broken in!" she breathed.

"Broken in? Burglars don't make all that noise," he laughed. "Besides, it's nothing. I don't hear anything."

"Nothing?"

She stared at him in the semi-darkness. He had heard; she was sure. His tone was odd. He did not seem astonished, nor particularly alarmed. It was almost as though this identical thing had occurred before. She fought with a sense of bewilderment.

"But——"

"Besides—rats in the rafters of an old house often make funny sounds," he said.

She had an inexplicable feeling that he was holding something back. "But they don't make them like that!" she protested. "No, no! Listen."

A new sound came, this time from outside. It was the creak of well chains; then a distant dull plop as the bucket hit water, and a slower creaking as it was drawn up again.

"They think no one lives here!" she

gasped. "They're taking possession of the house!"

Her heart beat wildly.

Jerry had risen, and was getting into his robe and slippers. He lighted the lamp on the table.

"Come on. We'll go down."

"Oh, no!"

"I'm not afraid, Eve. Come on."

He started for the door, taking up the lamp, then waited for her. His face was set determinedly. "I want to show you," he said.

Terrified, her heart in her mouth, she followed into the dim shadows of the wide hall down to the kitchen.

Jerry opened the door, then turned to her.

"You see?"

Instead of a laden table, their own stood against the wall, empty of everything save the white cloth she had placed there after dinner.

"But—but——" she gasped.

She went to the cupboard and looked inside it. Every dish confronted her from its accustomed place; in the drawers the knives and forks were neatly spaced. There was no sign of anything having been disturbed.

"But——"

She stared voicelessly at him.

"You see, we didn't hear anything."

"But, I tell you——" she cried. "Why, it was distinct!"

"But you see there's nothing been moved about or anything."

She clutched his arm.

"No, but——"

"Eve, I—don't know what it is," he said, staring straight ahead. "Of course there must be some explanation—"

"Then it is something. Jerry!"

She looked at him, terror-stricken.

"I've heard it before, Eve," he said heavily, "so has Bertie. I didn't want to tell you. I hoped you wouldn't hear them. I knew of course you'd be worried. I thought perhaps resting on the ground the way the house does might have something to do with queer noises.

"That's the real reason we got it so cheap," he went on. "The noises. You see we were strangers, and didn't know. No one who knew would live in it. And so far I haven't let on to anybody in town that I heard anything and give them the chance of knowing I was taken in."

"Why is it always called 'Mock house?' "

"Because they owned it originally, I guess. From what I've found out by talking casually about the place the Mocks hadn't lived there for fifteen years.

"Gossip says that Mrs. Mock left suddenly one day with the children and never came back. Mock stayed on for a while, then went to Iowa after he'd sold the house. They said he lived a pretty gay life there, blowing in money. Soon afterward the noises began."

He drew her out, shutting the door. They went up the stairs.

"You think it's—" she said, breathlessly.

"Spirits — ghosts? No, of course not. There's no such thing. You know that."

"No, of course not."

"I wish whatever it is hadn't picked on this house. Every night it keeps it up—got perseverance, I'll say that."

He laughed grimly.

"Every cent we had we put into it; it's ours; so I guess we'll have to stand it. I don't care for myself, but I knew how you'd feel, and Bertie. We're tied up, don't you see? But it's valuable, and I thought—"

She sat down in their room, trying to reason it out in some way.

"It—it's a branch of a tree scraping against the roof, that's all; or the furniture squeaking."

"No, that's not it. I looked to see for myself. There is no branch that touches the house," Jerry returned.

"Then——"

Jerry shrugged.

"The Mock place!"

She remembered the horror in the department storekeeper's voice as he said those words—the grocery clerk. So they, too, knew there was something wrong with the Mock house.

Wrong—but what was it? Berti; his fear. It had been fear; fear to go to bed at night. She swallowed nervously.

"All our savings. Oh, I suppose we can't leave," she said. "But how can we stand it!"

She put her hand to her mouth to keep her overwrought nerves from crying out.

SHE lay sleepless until morning, trying to scoff at her fears, at even the remembrance of the noices of the night before. As the sun poured into the room she felt relief in its cheerful warmth.

The smell of honeysuckle came through the open window. Below in the garden run to seed were several rose bushes that she would prune and trim, and a grape arbor needed only cutting to make it lovely again.

Their home. Joy of it returned. It was so peaceful; surely the events of the night before had been something of the imagination. Perhaps they were both silly with new-found nerves, making more active their fancy.

There must be some explanation, some rational reason for the phenomena, if phenomena there was. She wouldn't let herself think of it. Somewhere she had read that a thing was real only as you believed it. Then she would refuse to credit this thing, and thus shut it out of reality.

Why it would be easy, she said to herself, drinking in the winey air at her window. Easy with so much to be thankful for—freedom and opportunity for them all.

The day was full of matters to attend to, and Eve was occupied all morning. Bertie was talking of going swimming, and Jerry had gone off to town to buy seed and implements for his fall plowing.

"I'll be back before five o'clock," he told her as he left.

"All right, dear."

As the day waned she saw Bertie playing in the yard, then suddenly noticed him throw down his baseball bat and come into the house where she sat hemming curtains. He huddled in a chair, and sat tensely staring out the window.

"What's the matter, Bertie?"

He shook his head. She glanced at him from time to time. He seemed to have lost all interest in play. After a moment she saw him sit up, as though to listen.

At the same instant, she was aware of a wagon, heavily laden, driving in from the road which was hidden from the room in which they sat. Then a loud "Whoa," and with a creaking of wheels and harness the wagon stopped.

"Why, it's father, Bertie," she exclaimed. "He got a lift from someone."

She ran out on the front porch to welcome Jerry, Bertie beside her. And then she stood still, feeling oddly foolish, staring at the empty roadway.

There was no wagon to be seen. The smooth surface of gravel shone in the waning sun. An automobile was spinning past on the main road. A flock of doves cooed on the barn roof. But of horses or occupant there was no sight.

"Why, where can he have gone?" she said bewilderedly. She turned to Bertie, and discerned an expression of terror on his face as he thrust his hand in hers; held it tightly.

A chill ran over her.

"Bertie!" she said weakly.

"Every night about this time it's this way," whispered Bertie. "Like somebody driving in here and stopping, but you can't see anything."

He moistened his lips as though his throat were dry.

"Papa said he'd be here. It wont come any more today, though."

"There now, it's nothing."

She recovered herself for his sake, trying to put a matter-of-fact appearance on the occurrence.

"Nothing at all, Bertie, dear."

"No," he said without conviction.

They went into the house, her mind in a turmoil. The remembrance of the events of the night before returned to her with renewed force. The sensation of fear again enveloped her; but she banished it with an effort of will, trying not to think of anything.

She felt comforted by the sight of Jerry in the Ford returning a few moments later. He had been detained by a breakdown, and stared at her questioningly. Bertie ran out to him, told him "It" had come again. Jerry put his arm about his wife.

"Pshaw. Bertie's got too much imagination, hasn't he," he laughed, winking at Eve. "I told him going to all those movies would do it."

"I didn't imagine," she insisted stoutly. "And you didn't, either. You said——"

"Never mind what I said," he commanded sharply. "Run in and untie some of those bundles I brought."

She was glad he was only a child yet, with a child's capacity for sound sleep. And there was no good talking about the matter, for that only made matters worse.

"Can't kill us anyhow, dear," he whispered when they were alone.

She shivered. "I'm not afraid."

"Of course not. It's nothing."

"Nothing?"

"At any rate, it was a long time ago, whatever happened."

SHE told herself that she would go upstairs alone that night. But to her relief Jerry rose at the same time, locked doors and windows preparatory to retiring for the night; and she waited to go up with him to the room at the head of the stairs on the second floor. She resolved to go instantly to sleep.

She must. There would be nothing to hear tonight. She picked up a radium dialed watch and looked at the hour. Nine-thirty.

Then, unmistakably, she heard something outside their door, the sound of footsteps coming up the wide stairway. She lay rigid. Her heart beat loudly, and above it, the footsteps—and another sound, as though someone were tapping the rounds of the bannister.

Eve waited for—she knew not what; her hand at her throat. The steps reached the landing, drew nearer their door. The moonlight from the window of their room threw the handle of the door in relief; and she lay half sick, staring at it—waiting for the knob to turn!

After a moment, the steps went on, up and up. Then there was silence, as though they had gone into some oblivion. And from below she heard again the movement of the night before, the clatter of dishes in the kitchen, and the clink of cutlery; the creaking of the well chains. Then silence.

She listened, scarcely breathing: but the ghostly footsteps did not return.

The sound of feet—*and nothing there!* A wave of faintness enveloped her.

"John!"

John stirred; awoke.

"What is it?"

She told him, in a panic.

"Oh, yes, I know. That walks often," he said reassuringly, patting her arm. "But there's something else

that you haven't heard yet, that always follows the steps. Something upstairs."

"You mean, in the place where—It—goes to?"

She shuddered.

"Yes. There it is now. Do you hear?"

They held their breaths. And as they did so they heard a strain of distant, tinkly music, joyous with abandon. Then in the very midst of it a sudden breaking off.

"Let's go up." Jerry took up the lamp. "There's nothing."

The door of the room on the third floor had been closed to keep dust out. As they reached it they heard what seemed to be something falling to the floor with a soft swish, like a bag of flour.

Jerry opened the door and went in. Eve followed, trembling. The room seemed innocent enough in the soft lamplight. It was bare, except for a trunk or two they had stored there. A built-in closet of walnut stood at the right, its doors half open.

Eve became conscious of a prickly feeling down her spine; a sudden tension, like the premonition of the thing that had impended—as though something in the room held its breath. Then, so faint as to be scarcely audible—the sound of a muffled ticking, like a clock caught in folds of heavy cloth.

"Why should it sound like—like something ticking?" she asked.

"Perhaps a clock was near someone who was killed, and it got entangled in the bedclothes," Jerry answered.

"Oh, Jerry! Come away!"

Jerry drew her out again, back to the room below.

"There's nothing to worry about now," he said. "That was long ago."

She sat down on the bed.

"I can't stand it!" she gasped, clutching her hands in each other.

"There, there. We can leave in the Spring when we get the legacy, if you want to, but—to whom can we sell? No one will buy it in town, and unless we wanted to deceive a stranger as we were taken in, we'd have to tell him, and if we did—then the deal would be off anyway."

"Yes, I suppose so," Eve assented. "But——"

"And with the house raised as I want to do in April, it would make it a valuable piece of property. Besides, I'm used to it now, aren't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"The Italian shoeman the other day was quite talkative about the place, when he found I lived here. He seemed quite proud of the fact that the town had a mystery—'haunted house,' he termed it."

"Did he know why?"

"No. He shook his head and gesticulated a lot. Told me solemnly that ghosts always had good reasons for what they did. They never walk, he said, unless they are unhappy, or are unavenged."

He smiled, but Eve stared at him in horror. "Oh, Jerry, do you think——?"

"I—don't know."

WINTER came with its blanket of snow; then sleet, and rain. Spring had descended, with the new planting; and—April.

Jerry secured a reasonable estimate of the work, and went ahead with the operations for raising the house. In a comparatively short time huge beams lay under it, supported by heavy jacks at each corner.

The earth was ready to be dug for the foundation when one day one of the workmen, departing for lunch, came to Jerry.

"There's something that looks queer here, Mr. Wilbur," he told him.

Jerry followed the workman to a

place under the house, stooping to avoid the board partitions. Beneath the kitchen the workman pointed to a mound of earth.

A grave! At Jerry's command the two began to dig. In the damp earth they found the remains of a body, now past recognition. The bits of man's clothing upon it was of a common k i n d, indistinguishable from any other's. The workman, an old resident, who knew all the doings of the township for the past forty years, was unable to call to mind any missing.

On being questioned, one of the other men said a Swedish peddler who used to come around each year selling things hadn't been by this year yet; but he had told several people he was going back to Sweden to stay for good; so the men had no idea who this body had been.

That night Eve and Jerry noted that they heard no sounds. From that time on, the noises ceased.

Also, almost simultaneously with the uncovering of the grave, they read of the news of the death of a former resident of the town—Bill Mock. While driving a team of horses, he had been violently thrown, his body dragged many feet before they were stopped. When they picked him up, Mock was horribly mangled.

Mysterious Notification

After an uneventful voyage a ship was within a day's sail of its Australian port. The night being fine, the captain went to bed with orders to his mate to call him if it was really necessary. He was abruptly wakened by hearing his name called in a loud voice, and springing up asked the mate what was the matter.

"Nothing, sir?"

"Nothing, then why did you call me?"

"I didn't, sir. Never opened my mouth."

Puzzled, the captain returned to his bunk.

Once more he was aroused by the voice, which he was sure was the mate's calling him. And once again the mate denied having uttered a syllable.

The captain was more puzzled than ever, and damning the mate heartily went back to his cabin, but this time lay down on a couch. He had not been there many minutes before he heard a peremptory call of "Come on deck, captain, or you'll lose your ship."

This time the captain was bent on discovering the mystery. Going on deck he found a fog had come up, and though the mate continued to deny having ever called him and swore that all was well, the captain took the bridge. He snatched the glasses from the mate's hands and put them to his own eyes. He was horrified to see a white line of surf ahead. In a few minutes they would be on the rocks.

Instantly the ship's course was changed, and eventually reached port in safety.

The captain, afterward questioned, said the voice had not frightened him, for it sounded exactly like the mate's, who to the end denied having summoned the captain on deck.

The Sinners' Wages

By DALE COLLINS

THE brothers Benn, Henry and Frederick sat side by side on a bench in the Singapore botanical gardens. They were depressed; they were decidedly depressed. There was no salt in life for them, and no profit either, which was a serious matter.

As a result of these circumstances Henry's face, which was long and horse-like, sagged and drooped openly in a manner painful to behold; and the round, red features of Frederick were inflamed with sadness like the setting sun on a summer's evening.

The horticultural beauties about them had no power to charm away the sorrows of the brothers Benn. They were hard men, preoccupied with the laborious task of earning a living without work, a task which—such is the justice of this social scheme of ours—leaves scant leisure for hobbies and outside interests.

The flowers of the field, therefore, in their own words, "left them cold," although they were fond of green things.

Abruptly Henry Benn, the elder, who wore the outer seeming of a clerical gentleman, sat upright. An expression of intense intelligence developed on his features, so that he appeared even as a horse which hears the rustle of oats in the feed-bag.

"Frederick," said he, "do you see what I see, or am I delirious?"

As he spoke he nodded, directing his brother's attention to a small man who had sat down upon a bench further along the path.

The new arrival was dressed in a duck suit, the cut and newness of which proclaimed to the observant beholder that he was a visitor to the East, a tourist.

He carried a green sun-umbrella very neatly folded; he wore gold-rimmed pince-nez; his face was the most innocent ever seen outside the Old Bailey dock. There was something so fresh and fragrant about his appearance that the mere sight of him conjured up thoughts of new-mown hay and dairy maids and rambler roses.

More innocent souls than the brothers Benn might have been tempted by that little man. He was a walking temptation, a perambulating invitation to sharks, tricksters and all those who lived upon their wits.

He cried aloud to Heaven demanding that some one should come and rob him.

Frederick Benn looked; he gaped; he drew quick breath; his healthy color was heightened by a flush of excitement.

"Henry," he remarked, almost in a reverent tone, "I see a number one, first grade, export quality, fifty to one on Mark!"

"I thought so," his brother an-

swered, relieved, "but I feared it might be the sun."

"Certainly not," said Frederick. "It breathes; it is a living specimen. We shall not have to sleep under the viaduct after all."

There had never been any danger of that, for they were a careful pair. The phrase was no more than a saying in the family—"The Lord is good!"

The manner in which Henry Benn pronounced these words was in keeping with his Cloth, and showed that, even if he were not a properly ordained cleric, he was at least a deeply religious man. In view of the early training of the brothers this was only natural.

"What do you think?" he went on. "The Spanish prisoner, the rosary trick or the thimble and pea?"

"Wash out the thimble and pea," Frederick answered. "This is too good to be wasted on foolishness. There's real money in this, my boy. I shall fade out of the picture, and you can interview our little friend and see what you think will be wise. He'll probably be staying a day or so and we should have scope. From now on you and I are strangers. Attaboy, and see what's doing."

"All right-ee," agreed Henry Benn. "Fade away. I would converse with this noble stranger. I feel it is my duty."

"He looks prosperous," said Frederick. "He should cut up very nicely."

He smacked his large lips heartily, like a cannibal anticipating a feast, and proceeded to fade away down the path, passing like a whale among the minnows of waxen-faced children playing rather listlessly in the charge of bland native nurses.

To the uninitiated the botanical gardens remained unchanged, but to the brothers Benn the place had suddenly become touched with the glamor of El Dorado.

LITTLE Mr. Lamb sat reading the *Singapore Times*. He was at peace with the world and charmed by the scene about him. At times his eyes were raised to delight in the glory of a flame-tree or to note with amused interest the attempts at merriment of the waxen children.

There was something delightfully naïve and ingenuous about his appreciation. Becoming conscious of that fact that he was no longer alone on the seat he cast a shy glance at his neighbor.

Mr. Lamb saw a thin, aesthetic looking clergyman of the missionary type. His eyes puckered at the corners with gazing to far horizons and his skin tanned by a long succession of tropical suns.

He had about him a note of strength, restraint and breeding which has long been the stamp of an Englishman, a stamp of which we are rightly proud.

For a time Mr. Lamb hesitated to speak, though he continued to fling side glances at his neighbor. The stranger, however, remained oblivious to him. The desire of a lonely man for the companionship of his fellows at last overcame Mr. Lamb's natural shyness.

"A delightful evening, sir, is it not?" he asked, craving indulgence with an Old-World bow.

The other was surprised, but courteous.

"Most delightful," he answered.

"The children here are pale, although they seem happy," Mr. Lamb ventured, encouraged.

"It's a bad climate for children," said the other.

His face grew wistful.

"I have sent mine home," he added, and his eyes rested upon the little ones in a way which confessed, de-

spite his English mask of reserve, that he sighed for those dear ones far away.

"You must miss them," said Mr. Lamb sympathetically.

"I do," came the answer, and then he left what was obviously a painful subject. "You're a visitor here?"

Mr. Lamb appreciated the reverend gentleman's feelings.

"Yes," he answered, "I am a tourist. My name is Lamb. By profession I am a designer of stained glass."

"How very interesting," said his new friend. "My name is Grey—I am the vicar of St. Cuthert's at Kuala Lumpur. If you are going there you must call and see our windows. They are poor things, but we are proud of them. Stained glass is always fascinating, I think. You design it, eh? How *very* interesting!"

Henry Benn's long face was lit from end to end with bright interest.

They talked together of many things, the conversation veering presently from windows and churches to the East.

"I'm afraid I can't find the East quite as romantic as all that," said the reverend gentleman, smiling a somewhat weary smile at Mr. Lamb's enthusiasm. "You see, I live here."

"It is odd," said Mr. Lamb, "that custom can stale even the East. I should hardly have thought it possible. Personally I find it most exciting. I feel that I never know what's going to happen next. Only recently in Rangoon——"

"A delightful town," his friend put in in parentheses. "My brother there is secretary to the Chief Justice of Burma. Did you meet him, by any chance?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I didn't. I am a very ordinary kind of tourist, you must remember."

The other brushed this modesty away with a little gesture.

"But you were saying—?" he prompted.

"Oh, yes—only the other day in Rangoon I was the means of causing the arrest of a murderer and blackmailer and his charming lady assistant."

"How very exciting! And how did that come about?"

MR. LAMB told the details of his experience with ingenuous pride very natural to a small, everyday citizen who had been involved by chance in a strange escapade.

He had an attentive listener, so attentive, indeed, that when Frederick Benn passed by on the lookout for a cue he received no sign from his brother who merely looked blankly at him as if he were part of the scenery.

"Hullo," mused Frederick, "I wonder what our little Henry is up to?"

"You see," Mr. Lamb was saying, completing his story, "I looked so absolutely simple—indeed, I am so absolutely simple—that I made a perfect police agent. The criminals never suspected for a moment. I must admit I found it rather thrilling, and I got an awfully nice letter of thanks from Detective Dancey for the help I had given him."

His listener expressed his interest in the tale, and sat thinking about it. It seemed to suggest to him a bright idea. He sat forward suddenly, with the manner of a man who has come to a decision.

"I have an appointment to keep, but I should like to meet you again," he said.

He looked enigmatic, almost sly.

"Perhaps I can put you in the way of another adventure."

He looked more enigmatic. "Things are not always what they seem, nor are people either," he added mysteriously.

Mr. Lamb, naturally enough, was puzzled and intrigued.

"I don't quite understand," he said.

"I don't blame you," came the chuckled answer. "But I must be away now. Will you dine with me tonight?"

"I should be charmed," said little Mr. Lamb, politely but also with the air of one who is steeling himself to take a risk because he is determined to be adventurous.

"That is excellent," said his friend, when the arrangements had been completed. "I am sorry that I cannot wait now, but I shall be able to enlighten you this evening."

He departed with kindly words, leaving little Mr. Lamb in a state of uncertainty and expectation calculated to prepare the way most effectively for the attack which was to follow.

THE Benns, Frederick and Henry, were engaged in a brotherly consultation over something in glasses at their small hotel, which, if not particularly select, was at least unknown to tourists.

"I had to keep on pinching myself to make sure that I was awake and not dreaming," said Henry, his eyes full of the reflection of happy memories. "It's an absolute gift. All we have to do is to decide how much we want and then collect the money."

"Great!" said Frederick. "We must spring another drink to celebrate."

He called for the boy.

"He poured out his heart to me," Henry burbled, loathe to leave the subject. "The fact that a *dee* used him as a stool-pigeon has quite turned his poor little head. He sees himself as a regular hundred per cent Sherlock Holmes and smart guy."

"It looks like a gift right enough," Frederick agreed. "A fool is all right to go on with, but a fool who thinks he's a smart Aleck—he's the man to come through with the real stuff."

The brothers Benn proceeded to go into Committee of Ways and Means and the subsequent proceedings were of a private nature.

CONFIDENT that it would return to him a hundred-fold, Henry had flung his bread upon the waters with a liberal hand. Mr. Lamb had been entertained at a dinner with assorted soothing and unclerical drinks, and now sat at ease with liquor, coffee and cigars, feeling full of friendship for the world and for his friend, who, now wearing a dinner jacket, did not look nearly so much like a clergyman.

The prince of acquaintance sat back in his chair, and looked with shrewd, friendly eyes at Mr. Lamb.

"I suppose, Mr. Lamb," he remarked, "you're wondering why I'm entertaining you like this, and, for that matter, wondering about me altogether?"

"Well," Mr. Lamb admitted, "I'm very grateful but rather overwhelmed and, quite frankly, curious."

Grey sat forward, smiling dryly.

"I am not an animated Hospitality Committee," he said, "and for that matter neither am I a clergyman."

Mr. Lamb looked astounded.

"I am not, indeed, what you take me to be at all. If you had not told me that story of my friend Dancey of the Bombay police we should have parted in the gardens and never met again."

"Really, you talk in riddles," Mr. Lamb protested mildly, his brow puckered.

"Then let me descend to facts. I, too, belong to the Bombay Detectives."

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" cried Mr. Lamb.

"It is—and a very happy one. My real name is Brown, and my clerical garb was merely in the nature of a disguise. I am here on a difficult case, but when you told me that

story about friend Dancey it occurred to me at once that the whole thing would be quite simple if I could persuade you to help me as you helped him."

Mr. Lamb looked dubious.

"Is there any risk?" he asked.

"None at all, and it's as simple as could be. I'm on the trail of a diamond necklet valued at fifty-thousand dollars, which was stolen from the Governor of Bombay. The man is here in Singapore, and anxious to dispose of his booty.

"It's no use my arresting him without getting the necklet. He's ready to sell, but my trouble was to find somebody who could act at the interview I've arranged through parties who needn't be named.

"You see, my go-between had to be somebody not connected with the local police and preferably a tourist with whom my man wouldn't be afraid to deal. Will you help me, and meet the rogue tonight?"

Little Mr. Lamb considered the position rather unhappily.

"I don't like the idea," he admitted.

"It will be quite easy," said Detective Brown. "All you have to do is to say as little as possible—he wont be anxious to talk—find out his price, fix another meeting, and that's where I come in."

He made a large gesture which conveyed graphically the certainty with which he spread his nets for those whom the law sought.

"But after that?" asked Mr. Lamb.

"Leave it to me," said the officer, ordering another liquor brandy which he had always found to be a convincing argument and persuader.

Little Mr. Lamb succumbed, and gave his consent.

"It is a pleasure," said Detective Brown," to find an honest citizen who is prepared to assist the law."

"Not at all! Not at all!" Mr. Lamb answered vaguely, for it was becoming evident that he was not accustomed to strong waters in large quantities.

MR. LAMB was in a somewhat excited condition when he returned from his interview with a criminal at a small and obscure hotel in an out-of-the-way part of the town. This was scarcely surprising, for such an experience was somewhat out of the ordinary for him.

"Well?" asked the detective anxiously.

"I met him all right," said Mr. Lamb proudly. "You'd arranged things well. There he was in the very room you said he would be, and he said mighty little but I saw the necklace. It's just as you described it. We're on the track all right."

"Great work," said Brown warmly. "I knew you could manage it. I don't want to be rude, but you look so perfectly honest that he simply couldn't help trusting you."

"I felt rather mean," Mr. Lamb confessed.

"Nonsense," the detective replied a trifle sharply. "You must remember he's a thief, a man waging war against society. Decent people can have no mercy for such a man. He's a big, red-faced fellow; his name's Hibbert. I know him well enough. He has a bad record."

"That's the man sure enough, and it's a beautiful necklet."

"One can buy nice beads for fifty-thousand dollars?"

"What did he ask for it."

"Five thousand," said Mr. Lamb.

"Um, that's awkward! And you're meeting him again at three tomorrow?"

"That's so."

Detective Brown stroked his jaw, and looked perplexed and sad.

"I didn't think he'd have the cheek to ask so much," he said. "It's rather upset my scheme. The trouble is that

I have only fifteen hundred available in cash, and he's sure to insist on ready money.

"Of course, you might meet him without the money, but I always believe in doing these things right. My plan is for you to be there with the cash, and actually handing it to him at the moment when I appear to make the arrest."

He paused and brooded.

"Look here, Lamb," he said suddenly, "will you help me even further than I intended? Could you draw the money from the bank and take it with you? It will only leave your hands for a few minutes, and you'll get good interest. There's a reward of five thousand dollars for the recovery of that necklet. You shall have half."

Mr. Lamb looked very doubtful, but at the same time there was a gleam in his eyes at the mention of the reward.

"I don't know——" he said, hesitating.

"Come, twenty-five hundred for the loan of thirty-five hundred for a few moments. It's fair enough. I'll give you my fifteen hundred in the morning before you go along there."

Mr. Lamb's caution was palpably being overcome by his greed.

"The fact is," he admitted, "that I have only three thousand and two hundred-fifty on my letter of credit."

Brown looked disappointed, but his good humor returned.

"After all," he said, "the man's not likely to haggle over the odd two hundred and fifty. You'll do it for me, then?"

"In for a penny, in for a pound," cried Mr. Lamb recklessly. "I'll help you. But you mustn't let me down. I mean to say I have no wish to put my all into the purchase of a stolen necklet even if I am getting a bargain. You will be there at the pyschological moment?"

"You can leave that to me," was the confident answer. "My professional career depends on this case. I shall arrive in the nick of time to catch him red-handed. I'll put you both under arrest as a matter of form and to prevent him getting nasty against you."

"How very thoughtful of you," Mr. Lamb interpolated gratefully.

"And we'll recover the necklet, get our money back, and in a month or so we'll each be twenty-five hundred better off, and the jolly old Governor will be delighted. We'll give you a great time when you come over to Bombay—Dancey and I between us, not to mention the Gov!"

Little Mr. Lamb colored with happiness at the thought of the good time which was coming to him and the thought of the friends he was making.

"It's awfully kind of you," he said.

"We are in your debt," said Detective Brown with honest gratitude.

He pressed Mr. Lamb's small, limp hand.

"And you say there is no romance in the East!" murmured little Mr. Lamb with a chuckle.

"You must remember, Lamb, that this is all in the course of the day's work with me," said Detective Brown. "It makes a difference."

"I suppose it does," said Mr. Lamb, and he smiled thoughtfully.

IN his own way Frederick Benn was an artist. Even though Mr. Lamb had not appeared as yet Frederick was acting his part.

As he paced the room of their unobtrusive hotel his steps were quick and furtive and he suggested a man fleeing from justice—a man who would be only eager to be rid of his spoils at the earliest possible moment.

His hair was rumpled, and his clothes suggested that they had been put on in haste. A single glance re-

vealed that he was one who lived in constant fear of the pursuing bloodhounds of the law.

In his pocket reposed the necklet which was to be disposed of at the bargain price of five thousand dollars. It had not been stolen from the Governor of Bombay, however, nor was it a diamond necklet. To tell the truth, it had been purchased in the bazaar for four dollars (Straits) and it was a fine example of the glass-blower's craft.

Frederick glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock, and Mr. Lamb was due. A slow, lazy smile dawned upon Frederick's large face, traveling about it on a happy pilgrimage.

"One is born a minute," he mused. "For the boobs who have been sent into this happy world much thanks."

It has already been indicated that the brethren had been carefully reared and instructed.

At 3.10, Frederick glanced at his watch again. On this occasion he frowned slightly. It was scarcely fair that a man who was fool enough to make such an appointment should be so thoughtless as to be late for it.

At 3.15, Frederick studied his watch carefully, as if prepared to doubt it rather than Mr. Lamb.

At 3.20, having shaken his watch and put it to his ear, Frederick went to the inner room. As he opened the door he met Henry, who had been awaiting the arrival of Mr. Lamb with emotions very similar to his own.

"He's not turned up yet," said Frederick, and beads of perspiration were on his brow.

"Funny thing," said Henry, stroking his lantern jaw. "Can't understand it. What time do you make it?"

"It's three twenty-two."

"He's bound to come. We must give him more time. Perhaps he thought you said half-past."

"That must be it," agreed his brother, more cheerfully. "Nothing to worry about. He's the safest thing we ever handled."

"Sure thing," said Henry.

They waited. At four p. m. they met again and faced the situation.

"He has fifteen hundred dollars of ours," said Frederick. "We can't wait round here any longer. Better go to the Raffles and look him up."

"The quicker the better," said Henry.

They went in rickshas and they went in haste.

At the Raffles Hotel a polite copper-hued gentleman told them news which was darker than his skin. Little Mr. Lamb had left at three p. m. by the steamer *Langsha*, which called at many ports throughout the Archipelago.

The brothers Benn looked at each other for a time in silence.

"Oh, hell!" said Frederick, bitterly.

"That's right!" said Henry, nodding stiffly.

LITTLE Mr. Lamb settled down comfortably in a corner of the smoke room, and, having ordered a half-bottle of wine, drew his small black book from his pocket and made mysterious signs therein which signified a profit of fifteen hundred dollars.

"If only the gentleman had been a parson," he ruminated, "he could have preached a splendid sermon next Sunday on the text: 'The wages of sin is death.'"

He closed the book and tapped the cover thoughtfully.

"There is no fool like a rogue, steward," he said, peering at the man through his pince-nez.

"Yes, sir," said the steward, who, from force of habit, was never surprised at anything anybody said.

Still Within the Law

By BAYARD VEILLER

Author of "Within The Law," "The Thirteenth Chair," etc.

A THREE PART STORY—CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XII.

"CAN YOU CRY?"

GOVERNOR Harkness placed Mary's problem before her clearly.

"There are too many *ifs* cloaking your facts," he said. "If Morton stole the necklace, if Sinclair discovered the theft, and if on that discovery he then threatened Morton, perhaps Morton killed him."

"I am sure," began Mary——

"That isn't the point," interrupted the Governor, "I have to be sure. As a man, I'm glad to help you, but as Governor I can't pardon your father, unless I know that he is innocent."

He walked over to where the girl sat despondently by his desk and looked down at her.

"You mustn't lose courage," he said kindly. "You've done wonders. You have found a motive for the killing of Mr. Sinclair; you have discovered a man who probably had that motive. What we have to do is to prove that your theories are facts. Where is Morton now?" he asked suddenly.

The girl shook her head.

"When did you see him last?"

"I can't remember," said the girl. "I think I saw him at father's trial, but I'm not sure."

Governor Harkness grunted. He turned away from her and walked back to his desk. He lit a fresh cigarette and threw it away. For five minutes he stood perfectly still and relaxed, a sure indication that his keen mind was racing.

Then he turned to Mary with a grin that was almost boyish, and because of his friendship for the girl, and his admiration for her indomitable pluck, he let fall from him the reserve and dignity with which he had learned as Governor to cloak his real personality.

"I guess," he said with a little grin, "we'll have to smoke that guy out. Here's the point," he went on, "if you're right about this fellow, and we've got to believe that you are, he's under cover. He thinks he's safe."

The Governor chuckled as he leaned over and pressed the bell on his desk.

"Let's give him something to think about."

He turned to his secretary who had entered the room.

"Tell the newspaper men," he said, "that Miss Travis has applied to me for a pardon for her father and that I have refused to grant it. You'd better make it pretty strong.

"Tell them how sympathetic I feel, how sorry I am for the girl; and you

might add a few kind words about my stern sense of duty; that the rights of the people of this sovereign state must be safeguarded, and that no matter what my personal feelings are, I must always do my duty.

"I guess you'd better arrange to let them see Miss Travis as she goes out of here, which will be in about ten minutes. She'll know what to say to them. Step on it."

The secretary hurried out. As the door closed the Governor turned quickly toward the girl.

"Can you cry?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mary.

"Then here's what you do," went on the Governor. "You go out of this office crying, and you don't have to pretend it, either. You've got reason to cry. I'm not going to pardon your father—that is, until you can show me that Morton did kill Sinclair."

The girl looked at him mutely.

"You've got a month to do this. If you fail, your father's going to be executed for the murder of Sinclair."

HE LOOKED suddenly at the girl. There was no prettiness about her tears; no pearly drops welled from her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Her face was convulsed and she was crying bitterly. Her breath came in racking, convulsive sobs. She was not beautiful, but she was honest and sincere and heartbroken. The Governor gave a little nod of approval.

"And there's just one thing more," he went on. "When you go out and meet those men tell them the truth. Tell them I wont pardon your father; that you've got a month to find the man who killed Sinclair, and that you're going to do it. Can you remember all that?"

"Yes," sobbed Mary.

"If they want to know anything else," went on Harkness, "don't tell them. Don't pretend anything; don't be anything you're not. If you want to cry, cry; if you want to stop crying, stop crying. Whatever you do, don't lie to those guys. It wont work."

He took the girl by the arm and gave her a little push toward the door. Mary turned to him for a moment.

"But I don't understand," she said.

"That'll be all right, too," said the Governor. "Just do what you're told. If I'm right you'll see what I'm after soon enough."

Later in the day the Governor completed his plan.

"Run down to New York," he said to his secretary, "find out where Morton is. When you've done that, go to some cheap detective agency, tell them where he is and engage them to watch him."

The secretary seemed puzzled.

"Don't you see, Governor," he said, "that if we employ cheap detectives they'll bungle it. This man Morton will know he is being followed."

"Yes," said the Governor with a slow grin, "he probably will."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OFFICER OF AID

MARY TRAVIS' statement to the newspaper men made no impression on Morton as he glanced idly over the paper the next morning. In fact, as he read the second paragraph of the headlines he laughed.

MARY TRAVIS HAS MONTH TO SAVE FATHER FROM THE CHAIR

All through his breakfast this line floated in the air before his eyes, and there came to fruition at that moment the wild plan which had been forming at the back of his brain for months.

The humor of it appealed to him; its daring bloated the vanity which had been growing in him since the night of the murder.

Clear-eyed and seemingly honest, Morton went to the girl with his offer of aid.

Mary's acting was gorgeous. She wept. She clung to his hands.

"No one," she sobbed, "no one has been near me. I have no friends, and now you've come to help me. I can't believe it."

MORTON'S smirk was hidden. Gravely he reassured the girl. He told her he was sure of her father's innocence.

"I know he didn't do this thing," said Morton. "I was at your father's trial."

"Were you?" said Mary, wide-eyed.

Suddenly Morton coughed. It was the same dry, crackling, staccato, nervous cough which had been the only sound in the courtroom at the minute during which the jury filed into their seats after the trial.

Subconsciously the sound had reached Mary's brain and its memory remained. Hearing it again, she remembered.

"I believe," said Morton, "that Sinclair was killed by some criminal."

"Yes?" said Mary.

"You see," said Morton, "he might have come into the house that night and have been hidden in Sinclair's room. Then when Mr. Sinclair and your father came in, he tried to escape. He might have been standing back of the door. Certainly he was behind your father.

"And my theory is that as he made his way toward the door Sinclair saw him, and before he could speak, the man shot him and got out of the room. He probably mingled with the guests and was in the crowd I saw standing about the doorway of the room as I came downstairs."

"C a m e downstairs?" repeated Mary.

"Yes," said Morton. "Don't you remember I said at the inquest that I had been in my room and that I had run downstairs at the sound of the shot?"

"Now I remember," the girl admitted. "I'd forgotten that."

"You know," said Morton after a pause, "it's only drug-crazed men who kill wantonly like that."

He rose to go.

"If you don't hear from me for a few days don't be surprised," he said. "I am going to disappear. I am going into the underworld, into the places where such people gather. You'll hear from me in a day or two."

Morton waited expectantly. He'd spread his lure before the girl. Seemingly she fell into his plans instantly.

"Take me with you," she said impulsively.

Or at least it seemed to Morton that she was impulsive. It was all too easy, too simple. To his twisted mind the girl was so credulous as to be scarcely worth his efforts. To have her with him was the one thing the man wanted.

Her confidence gained, he felt that he would be able to so occupy her time for the next week that there would be no chance for any unfortunate discoveries on her part.

Morton made a pretense of objecting to the girl's plan. He told her it would be dangerous; that he had better go alone.

MARY kept up the pretty comedy. She again became tearful and begged Morton to take her with him. Finally, and with a great show of reluctance, the murderer agreed.

Morton began the pretended search by leading Mary through the hilarious ways of many night clubs. His one object was delay. So with the

girl he spent one entire evening at a resort on Fifth Avenue.

Here he seemed well known. Even Red Dugan, a former prize fighter, whose well-tailored evening clothes concealed the still bulging muscles of his arms and shoulders, greeted him effusively. Mary looked about her bewildered. Morton explained that even here leaders of the underworld found welcome.

"In these places," he explained, "people mix."

He pointed to a couple dancing past their table. Mary knew the girl. The man, quiet looking, well-dressed, hall-marked by the telling results of a perfect valet's untiring work, seemed of the same class. Morton spoke of him with great admiration.

"Two years ago," he explained, "he was getting fifty dollars a week in a lawyer's office. He's worth a million."

In response to Mary's unspoken question he explained.

"He's in the liquor business," he said.

"A bootlegger?"

Morton laughed.

"Oh, no," he said, "he's a wholesale liquor dealer."

"But the law?" questioned Mary.

Morton laughed.

"My dear Miss Travis," he said, "there are no longer any laws for men worth a million dollars."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOSER CONTACT

TWO days later Morton discovered that he was being followed. His first impulse was the result of panic. Feverishly he started preparing for instant flight. He was seized with a clammy terror, the first he had experienced since the night of the murder.

And then, almost with his hand on the door latch, he realized that flight would be confession. Then the vanity which had become the controlling passion of Morton's life soothed him.

His jangling nerves became calm and he sat down to work out coolly and, he was quite sure, cleverly, the problem which confronted him.

What, he asked himself, would an innocent man do under these circumstances. He realized the danger of the withdrawal of his pretended efforts to help Mary, but felt that he must take some decided action to set at rest any suspicion that existed.

He realized that someone was employing the detectives. He was quite sure that Mary had nothing to do with it, and laughed quietly when he thought of the simple girl's blind efforts to discover the murderer.

WITHIN an hour, Morton's panic was gone. His plan matured and he was in action once more. He complained to the police that he was being followed by strange men, and demanded their arrest.

The police were sympathetic and non-committal. They made no promises, but as mysteriously as it had started the surveillance stopped.

Freed from it, Morton devoted all his time to the beguilement of the girl. Night after night they visited gay resorts, but in a descending scale.

From Fifth Avenue they went to Broadway, and from Broadway to the side streets, and from the side streets to Eighth Avenue, and from Eighth Avenue to the places frequented by negroes and run by negroes in the upper part of town. Then they drifted to Greenwich Village and Grand Street.

Each day brought a new hope to the girl. Closer contact with the man convinced her that her compan-

ion on these nightly prowls was a murderer, and that somehow, some way, he would betray himself.

Morton was with her constantly. He talked unceasingly of the murder, evolving new theories, new possibilities, and each day leading the girl in new by-ways of crime and debauchery.

She felt that her one hope lay in Morton. Each hour she became more firmly convinced of his guilt.

But out of all the intercourse with him and from all their strange wanderings there came nothing tangible. Three days before the date set for the execution of her father, Mary rushed to the Governor, only to find that he had been called away by the sudden illness of his mother.

His wife had gone with him, but for solace the girl found a message. He would be back in two days. She was to return to him in two days.

HERE then was the situation confronting the girl. In three days her father was to be killed by the machinery of the law. She had no reason to believe or to hope that Governor Harkness would intervene unless she could prove her father's innocence beyond any reasonable doubt.

She still believed in Morton's guilt, but had nothing on which to base that belief beyond her own intuition. In all the time she had spent with this man he had given no inkling of what was passing in his mind.

He was kind, friendly, sympathetic, and seemed eager to help her. But the girl could not reach in any way the things that she felt lay beneath all this.

In the night she wakened suddenly with a plan. To the girl it seemed brilliant and novel. But this was because of her ignorance. In reality it was part and parcel of that bag of tricks which police so frequently use, and which, for want of a better term, is called the third degree.

The girl dressed hurriedly and rushed to her lover. It had been weeks since they had seen each other. All her time, all her thought had been given to Morton.

At three o'clock in the morning, a frightened, half-dressed valet had admitted the girl to young Sinclair's apartment. With one gesture Mary brushed the valet and the proprieties aside and hurried into her lover's bedroom.

Dick was sleeping peacefully. Mary ran to him and shook him violently. He awoke with a start and sat up in bed staring about wildly.

"Dick," cried the girl, "you must get up. Now, at once."

Still heavy with sleep, the boy merely stared at her. Mary advanced toward him threateningly.

"Dick! Did you hear what I said? You must get up."

"I can't," said the boy, "I'm not dressed. If you'll go in the other room I'll come as soon as I can."

Mary plumped herself down on the edge of his bed and said to him: "Dick Sinclair, do you think I'm going to be bothered by a lot of conventionalities at a time like this?"

"A time like what?" murmured the boy.

"I've found a way," cried Mary. "A way to make Morton betray himself. If he's guilty, we'll know it, and if we know it we can make him confess.

"If he thinks we're going to search your father's house again, if I can make him believe that something has been left in the house which will be evidence against the murderer, he'll go there to get it."

Dick forgot his pajamas and sat up in bed.

"I want you," went on the girl, "to go to the house tomorrow with witnesses. No one must know you're there. You must all stay there in the

dark until he comes. If I can make him go, I'll follow him.

"If he's caught there maybe we can force a confession from him. Any time tomorrow wont do. I want him to go at night. I want him to think he's alone in that house in the dark. Do you understand? You'll be there?"

In his eagerness the boy started to climb out of bed. Mary giggled nervously. Then, kissing him hurriedly, she started toward the door.

"I guess I'd better go," she laughed as she ran out of the room.

CHAPTER XV

A MASTER'S MIND

UNDERNEATH a mask of complete indifference Morton had been hiding panic. His brain under the long strain to which he had subjected it no longer functioned acutely. And out of his weakness and terror he, too, evolved a plan.

He reasoned futilely. If Mary could be put out of the way, could be lost for two or three days, then she could do nothing to save her father. The case would be ended. The search for the real murderer would be stopped and he could rest again at night.

At first Morton's plan presented what seemed an insuperable obstacle. He felt that he would have no difficulty in inducing the girl to go with him wherever he wished. In the weeks that had passed she had been only too eager to follow him.

But the problem of finding the place where she could be hidden, where no aid could reach her, a place from which she would be unable to call for help, seemed an impossibility.

And then that long arm of coincidence which, after all, is one of the moving factors in all our lives, stretched out to aid him.

He saw in his newspaper at breakfast the announcement of Broadway Jack McDermott that his gambling house was a thing of the past. With a great blare of trumpets this popular gambler announced that he was through, that never again would he turn a card.

Morton remembered the house well. The heavy steel doors which had for years been impervious to police attacks, the barred windows which had made the brownstone house a fortress.

He called to mind the heavy carpets, the rich furnishings and hangings, the whole atmosphere of quiet elegance which had done so much to make McDermott's place what it was.

As he recalled these things, he laughed, because McDermott was a friend of his, and where could Mary be more safely kept than in an empty house with steel doors and barred windows.

Only one thing remained for him to do to make the place ideal in every way, and this he could do with a pair of scissors. It was no great trick, he said to himself, to cut a telephone wire.

McDermott, scenting a love scandal, had laughed grimly at Morton's request and handed him the keys to his house.

"Wont the dame think it funny," said the gambler with a laugh, "if you let her into an empty house?"

In his eagerness Morton hadn't thought of that.

"Why don't you have me leave my man here to open the door when you ring?" suggested McDermott. "After you get in the house he'll beat it."

He laughed and slapped Morton on the back.

"Once aboard the lugger, hey, kid?"

Morton, whose thoughts were miles away from love and who could think of Mary only as a Nemesis, tried to look self-conscious. McDermott mis-

interpreted his sickly grin and laughed again.

"There's nothing in the ice-box," he said. "Does the lady drink?"

"No," said Morton, "she doesn't drink."

INWARDLY Morton was screaming with laughter when he met the girl. His mental pictures of her horror and consternation when trapped in that lonely house were ludicrous. To his warped mind it all seemed a Gargantuan joke. But Mary's troubled eyes discerned nothing of this. He was so calm, so placid, so friendly.

She was the first to speak. For hours before she had been planning her attack, and even Morton's suspicious brain could detect no trace of duplicity in what she said. Under the keen scrutiny of his mind she seemed an eager girl, not very clever, fighting a hopeless fight.

When she told him that she had a new plan he seemed to be sympathetic and eager to help, because at first there was no hint in what the girl said of what that plan might be. But as she unfolded it, the man silently thanked what he was graciously pleased to call God that his own plan was perfected and ready.

"This is what I thought," said the girl. "Of course," she went on, "it's only a wild dream, but the time is so short and we've done nothing—nothing."

The tears which came to her eyes she wiped hurriedly away.

"I've been trying to make my mind work as if I were the guilty person," she went on. "You remember, Mr. Morton, it was established that the man who killed Mr. Sinclair wore gloves."

Morton nodded, but hardly trusted himself to speak.

"You yourself have said that you thought he must have rushed from the room and mingled with the guests."

She looked up at the man. By now the murderer had his voice under control.

"Yes," he said, "I remember that."

"It seems to me," went on Mary, "that having thrown away the pistol which he used, his next impulse would have been to get rid of the gloves he wore. There might have been a stain on them, or a powder mark, or grease from the pistol.

"I don't think he would have done this if he stopped to think, but it seems to me that at first he would have acted on impulse and thrown those gloves away. I don't believe he would have put them in his pocket any more than he would have put the pistol in his pocket.

"It seems to me that in his mind the gloves and the pistol were linked together in some way. And having thrown away one, he would have discarded the other. Don't you think I'm right, Mr. Morton?"

Morton smiled tolerantly. If the girl could have seen into his mind she would have seen the sick terror which spread over it as he remembered tearing off the gloves that night and throwing them into an empty closet in his room.

"I think you've reasoned that extremely well," he said quietly.

It's all he could say. He remembered the gloves as they lay on the floor of the closet, the fingers bent as if clutching at something, and the ugly black stain which the girl had imagined stretching in reality across the palm of the right glove. For a moment the man was violently nauseated. There was a clammy, sick feeling at the pit of his stomach.

Mary's voice broke in on his troubled thought.

"Mr. Morton, as you came down from your room did you notice anyone without gloves?" asked the girl.

Morton managed a short laugh.

"I don't think I'd have noticed that," he said.

"No, I suppose not," said the girl.

BEFORE she could speak again Morton interposed.

"But even supposing that you're right, and that those gloves are still in Mr. Sinclair's house, how will they help you?"

"Suppose they weren't new gloves," interrupted the girl, "suppose they'd been cleaned. Couldn't we trace them that way? Wouldn't there be a mark on them of some sort?"

Morton couldn't remember. Had he worn new gloves that night or had the girl, in what he thought was her blundering way, hit on a clue which seemed to lead to arrest, conviction, and death? Had he worn new gloves or old?

Morton coughed—that queer, staccato, brittle exhalation of breath which Mary had heard twice before in her life and had remembered. As she recognized it for the third time, she was barely able to suppress a shout of triumph. To crowd it down she leaned forward eagerly and questioned the man again.

"Don't you think it's worth trying, Mr. Morton?" she cried.

Morton looked at her calmly.

"I certainly do," he said. "It's a wonderful idea." Then, after a pause, "When are you going to do this?"

"Tomorrow," said the girl. "Dick Sinclair's away and we can't get the keys until tomorrow. The house is closed. There's not even a caretaker there. We have to wait until he comes back."

This is what Morton thought—— "I am too big a man to be caught. In all this case I have made but one blunder and I have time to retrieve that. What a silly girl this is, and how smart I am! And what a wonderful plan mine is—this locking her in an empty house! That plan is a stroke of genius."

What Morton said was, "You'll let me go with you, wont you, when you make this search?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"Of course," went on Morton, "it may not be necessary. I don't want you to place too much hope in this, but I have a feeling our search is ended. I am going to take you tonight to see a man I know. I've done favors for him and he wants to pay them back. Last night I told him about our trouble. It is our trouble. isn't it?" he added.

"Yes," said Mary, "oh, yes, indeed—ours."

Morton smirked.

"At my friend's house we are to meet a man who knows everything that happens. He is in touch with all the criminals."

"Oh, I see," said the girl. "A sort of a master mind."

Morton thought of his own brilliant intellect.

"Yes," he said, "that's it exactly. A master mind. Tonight we go to this man. I can't promise anything, but I hope for everything. You'll be ready at eight?"

Mary nodded. Morton smiled and left her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROPER THING

IT was a bitter moment for the girl. None of the things she'd planned had happened. She had visions of Morton making excuses to get away. She had been sure that he would rush to that empty house that night to destroy any evidence he might have left behind him.

Instead he had suggested new avenues of investigation, a new place to go, had shown an eagerness to be

with her rather than to get away from her.

As Morton pressed the bell of the house in the East Forties the door of which seemed to be old mahogany and which was really two-inch armor plate, it swung open silently. A sedate, perfectly appareled butler greeted them.

"Is Mr. Witherspoon at home?" asked Morton.

"Not yet, sir," said the butler. "He has just phoned and will be a moment or two late. He told me to ask you to wait, sir."

They had hardly entered the lavishly furnished drawing-room when the heavy thud of a closing door told Morton that he was alone in the house with the girl. He used the sound as his own excuse for leaving the room.

"I expect that's my man now," he said. "I'll be right back."

The second closing of the door made no impression on the girl, and of course she couldn't hear the click of the lock as Morton turned the key from the outside and made her a prisoner. As he locked the door he dropped the key into his pocket with a little chuckle and ran lightly down the steps into the street.

After a few minutes Mary began to wonder. She wandered out into the hall and called. Getting no response, she called a second time. There wasn't even an echo to answer her. Still no suspicion of what had happened to her entered her mind.

Quite casually she went to the front door to open it and it was only when she found that it was locked and that there was no key and no way in which she could open it did a realization of her plight come to her. And it was a very dim understanding of it when it did come.

Her first reaction was jubilant. She took Morton's trick in shutting her into the house as a sure indication of his guilt.

She reasoned he had imprisoned her in order to be free to rush to the Sinclair house and destroy any evidence that lay there against him.

Mary thrilled with pride at her own cleverness, and she sat on the lower step of the stairs while she gloated.

SITTING there she pictured Morton as he rushed toward the Sinclair house. In her mind's eye she saw it standing dark and seemingly empty as he made his way to it. She imagined his furtive entrance, his climbing the stairs in the dark, and all this under the watchful eyes of the men she'd set to trap him.

Until that moment the significance of her enforced detention in this house had not come to her. And then in a flash the urgent necessity for her presence there came upon her. They could trap Morton, but without her could they make him confess, and if they got the confession would they know what to do with it?

She rushed into the front room planning to call for help from some passerby in the street, only to find that she couldn't reach the windows. The heavy curtains, which had been drawn, concealed the iron grillwork. Ineffectually she tried to open this, then she rushed to the second floor in the house.

She ran hurriedly through the richly furnished rooms, one opening into the other, but again the windows were barred and out of reach. And on the third floor, it was the same.

Subconsciously she wondered what sort of a house this was, with no bedrooms and steel barred windows.

After that she tried to get to the roof, and found that egress there was shut off by a heavy steel door, and this time concealed by no imita-

tion woodwork, but standing before her frankly for what it was, a steel door heavily studded with bolts.

At this she became a little frightened. She quickly made her way down to the first floor, and after she ran down the three flights of heavily carpeted stairs she reassured herself with the thought that after all she was in a big city with ample police protection, and all that it was necessary to do was to call for help on the telephone.

At first she could find no telephone; then in the back room on the main floor she found the telephone hidden in a lovely figurine of a woman of fashion in the days of the Civil War. Underneath it in a richly bound cover was the telephone book.

This she picked up to find the number of the nearest police station, and at the top of the book in staring letters she read: "In an emergency just say to the operator, 'I want a policeman.' 'I want to report a fire.' 'I want an ambulance.'"

What she wanted, of course, was a policeman. Then she discovered that the telephone was not in working order. And she was seized with a real panic.

HOW could she call for help if there was no telephone? She ran to the windows again and tried to force open the steel grill. She took a poker from the fireplace and tried to break it with that, but the grill, which had withstood the axes of the Police Department, showed scarcely a dent for her ineffectual blows.

At the telephone again, hoping against hope that it might work, only to put back the dead instrument with a little sob, she stood staring down at the telephone directory but not seeing it. In the bitterness of her complete realization of Morton's cleverness her mind was incapable of registering outside impressions.

She was locked by barred doors and windows in an empty house, as much a prisoner as her own father.

All her plans to aid him had been smashed by her faith in her own ability to cope with Morton, and he had tricked her and cajoled her and she was powerless.

Then slowly the things she saw began to impress her. "In an emergency just say 'I want a policeman!'" And she couldn't say that no matter how much she wanted a policeman. There was no way of voicing her need.

"I want to report a fire." That was the way out. Call the fire department with their ladders and their axes. The firemen would get her out of the house with no trouble.

She looked again at the dead telephone. How could she report a fire; how could she call to her aid this most efficient public servant?

She gave a little shout of triumph, for she had found a way out of her difficulty. If there was a fire she wouldn't have to report it. At the slightest sign of smoke creeping out of that house a dozen people would report the fire.

So, hurriedly and with no thought of her own danger, Mary dragged down light silk curtains and tapestries and piled them in a heap in the center of the floor. She tore down the heavy velvet curtains which obscured the windows so that the glare might be seen from the street.

She tried to reach the glass in the windows to break it so that the smoke could billow out, but the grillwork was too small, and she failed in her attempt.

Then she touched a match to the mass of inflammable stuff in the center of the floor and sat down on the stairs to wait for her deliverance.

But no deliverance came. The red glare of the flames which Mary had counted on to attract the attention of

passers-by could not be seen from the street. Each pane of glass in the windows had been heavily coated with paint.

The owners of the gambling house had taken care that the police could neither break in nor look in. Instead of burning with a clear flame the materials from which the girl had made her fire gave off a heavy, acrid smoke which nearly suffocated her.

She was soon driven to the second floor of the building. The fire had now gained great headway and was roaring beneath her. The stairway soon caught and through the wall which the stairs formed through the center of the house the flames mounted as if it were a chimney.

The heat and smoke drove her ever upward. She rushed to a bathroom and saturated towels with water. These she wound about her mouth and nose to prevent suffocation.

She soon realized that her only hope lay in finding some spot on the top floor of the house, and she dashed in terror up the remaining two flights of stairs. As she reached the third floor a crash and a fiercer gust of flame and cinders told her that part of the stairs had fallen.

THEN she heard the welcome wailing of the sirens of the approaching engines. But this sound gave her little hope as she saw no way of disclosing her presence in the house.

It was not by chance that the firemen learned that there were lives to be saved. McDermott, the owner of the house, heard of the fire and rushed toward the building which he owned.

He fought his way through the crowds until he reached the police lines which held them back out of the danger zone. The policeman who tried to stop him was an old friend, and McDermott raced through until he reached the fine chief.

"There's a man and woman in that building!" he shouted.

The chief merely stared at him. Wild with excitement, McDermott seized the chief and shook him wildly.

"I tell you there's a man and woman locked up in there!" he cried.

Then the old fire-fighter went into action. He rushed to the hook-and-ladder apparatus. Two men with axes sprang toward the nozzle of the portable water-tower, and, hanging onto it, were lifted bodily through the air.

The tower rose, swung forward and came to a stop close to the windows on the top floor, which they smashed. In the glare of the burning room, sharply silhouetted by the flames, they saw Mary clinging to the iron bars which shut her into the room.

The men wasted no time here. Other men, swarming up the tower, took their places, while they climbed to the roof and began to cut through it toward the girl. A stream of water pouring into the room half drowned the girl but kept back the flames for a moment.

As the fresh night air came into the room through the broken glass she dropped the towels from her face and breathed deeply. Here was no heroine of fiction. A young girl, wet, bedraggled, her face smudged and begrimed from the dirt from the fire, clung screaming in terror to the iron bars which she thought kept her from safety.

She was too far gone in her panic to hear the heavy crash of timbers above her head as the fire axes cut their way through the roof toward her.

The men on the tower shouted to her, tried to explain what they were doing, but the girl's mind no longer functioned. She clung to the bars, wailing in her terror.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, an arm reached down toward her. At this point the girl should have looked up and smiled in relief and happiness at her rescuer. This would

have been fitting and beautiful.

Mary did nothing of the sort. She clung to her iron bars as if in them lay her only security. The firemen called down to her, but the girl was incapable of reason and entirely unable to obey orders.

AUTOMATICALLY the two men worked together. The heavier of the two sat on his companion's feet and ankles and the fireman swung backward and head down into the burning room. There was nothing courteous, nothing gentle, and no tenderness in his movements.

He grabbed Mary by the back of the neck with one hand, slapped her smartly across the face with the other, and when at this sudden and unexpected assault she loosened her hold on the bars, he seized her with both hands.

First around the neck, then slowly working her upward he got his hands under her arms and started the extremely difficult task of lifting her to the man on the roof.

At this point the floor in the room beneath them gave way and fell to the cellar. Still lying on his companion's feet and legs, the other fireman reached down and swung the girl to the roof. The human scaling ladder swung up after her.

Then Mary did the proper thing. She fainted. Picking her up, the men rushed to the cornice of the building. They made hurried semaphore signals and the hooded top of the water tower rose quickly toward them. With the unconscious girl in his arms one of the men sprang on this and the others followed.

The tower rose still higher and swung out from the burning building. There, with the unconscious girl in his arms, the man who did jobs like this for a salary of two thousand dollars a year clung to the swaying water-tower four stories above the street, while a Broadway night crowd screamed itself into hysteria over the heroism which it would forget by morning.

CHAPTER XVII

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

AS Morton approached the Sinclair house he felt that a master mind was truly at work. He had discarded his own shoes for others wider and longer. No smart detectives would track him by footprints.

Over his cold, nervous hands he had dragged a pair of rubber gloves such as brides wear to protect their hands at housework. They were red.

He did not notice this when he bought the gloves, but as the thin tissue stretched over his cold hands he noticed the significance of their color. Then he shrugged away the tremor which this color had brought on him and made his way silently toward the house.

It loomed before him in the night, dark and seemingly untenanted. Within the house sat young Sinclair and his companions. They were not together. Sinclair sat in the large drawing-room which opened into the main hall. The door was partially ajar. Another man sat nervously in the dead man's empty study.

Two others were on the upper floor. They had been there for hours, waiting, making no sound, scarcely breathing, because Sinclair had impressed upon them the importance of this.

He had told them what they might expect and each man, armed with a piston and a strong-rayed flashlight, knew the work he had to do.

Morton first made a complete circle of the house; then with tools he had taken from his car he forced open the heavy wooden shutters which barred the window. The crash of splintered wood sounded to the man like a peal of thunder, and

he sprang into hiding in shrubbery near the window.

Here he waited until in his own mind he was certain that he alone had heard this sound, and the house was indeed as it seemed, empty. Once reassured, he boldly smashed a pane of glass and through this opening slipped back the window-latch and raised the window.

Leaving this open behind him, he entered the house more boldly. The small tools he had used in forcing his way into the place he slipped back into the pocket of his coat, and then with his flashlight quickly explored the room.

To his cursory glance it seemed empty, and slowly he made his way toward the half-opened door to the hall. In this brief journey he passed within a few feet of young Sinclair, who stood behind heavy curtains, into the protecting folds of which the boy had sprung at the first sound made by Morton as he forced his way into the house.

In the hall Morton stopped for a moment and his flashlight played quickly from point to point about the hall. He paused for a moment at the door of the room in which he had killed the old man, and the whim seized him to go in, but he felt the need of haste and passed the door.

Then walking carefully up the stairs, his flashlight playing always before him, Morton made his way without a sound to the upper floor.

It was a slow, laborious progress. He was careful to touch no stair-railing, and no part of the wall, even with his gloved hands.

He knew that his heavy shoes might leave some slight imprint on the carpets. He had read detective stories and he remembered that the police had a way of determining a man's height from the length of his stride. So he took longer steps and, doing this, felt secure from any detection.

At the top of the stairs the murderer stood and listened. He heard no sound except his own hurried breathing and a queer, rhythmic, hurried throb like the engine of a motor at a great distance. This he realized was the sound of his own frightened heart.

In a rush he reached the closet. This was the goal of all his scheming and planning. On the floor where he'd thrown them lay the gloves, palms upturned, the fingers slightly curled as if grasping toward something. He snatched them up.

The girl had been right. Inside the gloves were the telltale numbers put there by cleaners.

Morton was barely able to suppress a shout of triumph as he slipped the gloves into his pocket and hurriedly but with silent caution made his way downstairs.

At the bottom he stopped, and then gave a sudden shriek of terror as the white glare from five separate flashlights centered on him.

One light more powerful than the others focused on his face half blinded him. Instinctively Morton reached for his pistol, but his hand stopped halfway toward his pocket as a rough voice broke in on his racing thoughts:

"If you don't want a bullet in your stomach, stand still."

Morton's hand dropped to his side. The murderer stood no longer at bay, no longer defensive, but peering about like some trapped animal trying to see past the blinding, unwavering glare of those flashlights.

And there Mary found him. The men, too taken up with the excitement of their own work, had not heard the sound of her roaring motor as she drove to the house. Her quick rush about the place had shown her the open window and through this she had made her entrance.

Wet, bedraggled, and dirty, but grim and triumphant, the girl made her way past the circle of men which surrounded the murderer and walked up to Morton. He looked at her, but did not speak.

Her face hardened into grimmer lines as she reached him. There they stood, in brilliant white light which came in glaring paths out of the darkness which surrounded them, the murderer and the girl who had caught him.

Without speaking Mary held out her hand. Morton couldn't meet her eyes and stood broken before her. His mind refused to act. Almost as one hypnotized he reached into his pocket and handed the gloves to the girl.

As the full significance of this action dawned on the girl she burst into violent weeping. Then her lover turned on the lights in the house and took the girl in his arms. Neither of them spoke. They kissed each other silently.

THE END.

A Haunted Ship

There are many tales of haunted ships, but the most uncanny and best authenticated case is that of the *Squando*. This oddly named vessel was a Norwegian bark on board of which was perpetrated an atrocious crime, while she lay in San Francisco bay about the year 1886.

A ghastly cry was heard from her one night, and in the morning the decapitated body of the mate was found below in a welter of blood. The captain and his wife, with whom the mate for reasons unknown had been on bad terms, were charged with the murder. This was the first tragedy.

The succeeding captain was killed in a mutiny, and the next two in mysterious and unaccountable circumstances.

The ship was now hoodoo, and on her arrival at New Brunswick in 1893 the crew deserted to a man.

No other crew could be induced to go on board and the Norwegian consul took up the matter. Two stolid watchmen were hired to go aboard the haunted ship with orders to make matters warm for the jokers who were playing the tricks the consul had been told about.

The two men settled themselves in the captain's cabin and for a time thought all was well. An extraordinary noise brought them on deck to discover it littered with ropes, spars, yards, etc. But they could find nobody or nothing to account for it.

They retreated to the cabin again where they experienced terrifying assaults from unseen hands. Their lamp was blown out, and warning whispers to 'get out at once' came from every side. They came to the conclusion this was no place for them and made for the deck, pursued by a ghastly headless creature. Tumbling into their boat they pulled frantically for shore.

Two others were engaged and scared off. Others were hired until neither love nor money could induce anyone to set foot on the *Squando*. The vessel had to be abandoned and sold for firewood.

"M. W. the F. M."

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

THE heart of Michael Whipple was filled with benevolent thoughts for all mankind this Sunday morning. The February day had begun auspiciously for the little dealer in cigars, newspapers and periodicals. Breakfast had passed without any of the usual acrid comments from his sister Sarah, which even after so many years still had power to hurt.

Michael, a small and happy island in the sea of Sunday supplement spread about the old rocking chair, was just biting the end from his second cigar when the agitated coming and going in his bedroom overhead ceased suddenly.

"Michael! Michael Whipple!"

Michael started with a blink of his brown eyes and stretched his neck upward in a vague alarm.

The summons was repeated impatiently, and he rose to his feet and stepped nimbly to the door.

"Whatsamatter, Sarah?"

Miss Whipple put a question of such a personal nature that for an instant her brother gasped.

"Say!" he shouted indignantly, "sure I did. Didn't you hear me running the hot water last night? Of course, I had a bath, Sarah. Eh? Whatsat? Sure, I washed them."

"You did not!" retorted his inquisitor.

"Oh, for pity's sake. Do you think I stood on my head in the bath?"

"Come up here. Seeing's believing."

"Doggone old crank!" murmured Michael. But he obeyed.

"What's that?" asked Miss Whipple, a forbidding figure in a skimpy dressing gown, and a woolen shawl shrouding her sallow peaked face.

She pointed to the offending sheet.

"Right where your feet lie. Mud!"

Michael stared aghast at the muddy marks.

"Now, how in the name of peace did that come there?" he demanded.

"That's what I'm asking you," said Miss Whipple pointedly. "I s'pose it don't matter to you. Oh, no! You don't have to wash the sheets, you don't. You don't care if I'm washing and ironing and cleaning and scrubbing from morn to night like a slave. Oh, no!"

"I don't know a darn thing about that mud," said Michael.

"I s'pose you'll be saying I put it there, just to start a row. I'm just sick and tired of you and your shiftless ways, Michael Whipple. You'd think I had nothing else to do but clean up your dirt. I s'pose the parlor carpet's an inch thick with your nasty cigar ashes. If I had my way, I'd make it a law for men to work Sundays as well as week days, like us women."

There was a flush on Michael's smooth-skinned, lean face, a twitch to the sensitive lips.

"But I tell you, Sarah, I took a bath last night. Honest, I did," he protested. "I wish you'd let up on me making a dirt 'round the house. Compared with some men I'm as neat as a pin."

"And as much sense in your head.

Well, are you going to stand there all day? Go back to your mess."

He came downstairs with a disconsolate expression. Suddenly he brightened.

"I couldn't put it past her dirtying that sheet just to get me in wrong. She's working up to something—probably me and Martha. Talk about tyrants. If ever there was one, it's Sarah."

He was amazed to find someone peering through the glass front door and hastened to open it. His neighbor from across the street, Professor Potts, stood on the porch, his tall angular form clad in a fur-lined overcoat.

"Good morning, Mr. Whipple. I've been ringing for a minute or so, but I couldn't get any answer."

"Bell's out of order," said Michael concisely. "Battery's run down. I guess I'll get a new one Monday."

"I wonder," said Professor Potts with a triangular smile, "if you could oblige me with a cigar. Just run out of my own, and the store's closed during service."

"Oh, sure. Come in. I can fix you up. This way. Don't mind this mess. Sunday morning, y'see."

MICHAEL swept the scattered papers into a pile and pulled forward a chair.

"Here you are."

The professor's hand hovered over the cigar box.

"Take a couple," said Michael affably.

"Hum!" The professor's gleaming teeth clamped down over the cigar. "Much obliged, Mr. Whipple. Nice room this. First time I've been in it. Books, eh? 'The Gipsy Dream Book.' Interested in dreams, Mr. Whipple?"

"Kinda foolish, ain't it? said Michael with a self-conscious smile.

"Not at all. Far from it," said the professor solemnly. "Some of the great thinkers—Freud and Havelock Ellis have paid a deal of attention to dreams. So you dream sometimes? Very important indication of the inward life. Yes, psychic."

"Yes, I kick," repeated Michael mentally.

Kick what? This sort of talk was a long way over his head.

"I guess you're right," he agreed hastily.

"Of course, anyone of your temperament dreams. I can see that at a glance—sensitive, high strung nature. I fancy you'd make a good medium," the professor continued smoothly.

He bent a searching glance upon Michael, who began to feel uncomfortable.

These references to himself were incomprehensible. What in the name of peace was a Medjum?

"Strange!" added the professor. "I wonder."

He paused uncertainly, then laid his hand on Michael's knee.

"Hum! Well — now—have you ever heard of D. D. Home?"

Michael sent his memory on an errand of search.

"No! Can't say as I ever did. What kinda Home did you say? D.D. That would be for preachers, I guess."

The professor gave a stifled snort.

"Amazing. Still—better so," he remarked mysteriously. "However, on second thought, I must run away. You and I must have a little confidential talk together. Kindred spirits, eh?" He rose to his feet. "I'll have another cigar if you don't mind."

"Sure! Help yourself."

"By the bye," said the professor at the door, lowering his voice. "My bedroom window faces yours. Needless to say, I am deeply interested. We must go into the matter carefully. Make a great sensation. Money in it; piles of money. However, later.

Good morning, and thanks for the cigars."

He bowed himself out, leaving Michael agape.

"He ain't right," he repeated doggedly. "What's he getting at? Watching my bedroom window, is he? Money in it? What in the——"

"Michael, what was the man wanting? Michael!"

He came out of his stupor.

"Borrying a coupla cigars, Sarah!" he shouted and returned to the parlor.

THE conversation had been such that he could never hope to reproduce it with a degree of clarity which would satisfy Sarah. And it was of a nature so enigmatic that Michael's brain had matter for bewildered reflection for the next week.

As he stood behind the counter of his store where he dispensed cigars and other smoking material, magazines, papers, cheap toys, candies and school equipment to the inhabitants of the Connecticut village, his mind kept reverting to the promise of Professor Potts.

The professor, a tall, angular man with high cheek bones which gave him an Oriental appearance, was, he understood, engaged in some mysterious business which took him away most of the year. What that business was no one in the village knew; but he owned his own home, paid his taxes regularly, and always had cash on hand. That in itself was a good sign.

Money made money. And money and Martha went hand in hand through the fairyland of Michael's dearest desire.

For years he had been beauing Miss Martha Jenkins, who combined the two delicate arts of dressmaking and hat designing. He paid her calls of a friendly but somewhat formal nature, and was permitted to escort her to Krug's Picture Palace. But Martha had stated their relationship quite plainly.

"I like you real well, Michael, and I'd miss you terribly if you were to go away; but when it comes to marrying, that's another thing. You see, Michael, I've seen what the lack of money means. My pa lost his, and it was one long struggle for ma.

"And you see on what I am just scraping along; but at least I have no one but myself to worry about. You have Sarah, and Lord knows that's worry enough. If you had money, Michael—but there—what's the use of talking? We can only wait and hope."

She was much of a height with Michael but, perhaps because she sat so much, plumper, with neat little hands and feet; and though some thought she had a managing way with her when she looked at Michael, her blue eyes grew soft and misty.

The professor's promise of money, if there were anything in it, would perform a miracle long prayed for. Gosh, the man was a puzzle.

THERE were several other matters puzzling Michael.

On Thursday morning he wakened to find his window shut down. Now, he could have sworn he had opened it wide before going to bed, for he was a great believer in fresh air, winter and summer. And also looking out of window, he was astounded to see footprints on the porch roof under it, as plain as anything could be in the snow.

But what was even more amazing was that these same footprints were repeated on the snow-covered roof of the garage which stood some twenty feet away in the adjoining yard. No one could possibly have leaped from porch to garage, and yet that was exactly what it looked like.

Who in thunder could have been up

to such a trick, and for what purpose? Nobody in their senses would think of burglary, for the contents of Michael Whipple's dwelling were known to all the village, and there was certainly nothing of value enough to tempt anyone to crime.

And as usual Sarah was on the warpath.

"I don't know what's gotten into you these days, Michael Whipple. You go round like a sick calf. In love, ain't you? In love at your age. Well, there's no fool like an old one."

"Who's old?" demanded her brother, touched on his tender spot. "I'm only forty-three. To hear you talk, you'd think I was Methuselah."

"Well, all I can say," said Sarah with dark emphasis, "if you bring that pins-and-needles Martha Jenkins here, out I go. Her and me wont never keep house together. When she comes traipsing in the front door, I go out the back."

It was on Michael's tongue to remark he wanted nothing better; but years of nagging had taught him discretion, and he made no answer as he reached for his hat.

"If I was dumb as you, which, thank God, I ain't, I'd see a doctor, and get my tongue string cut," Sarah hurled after him. "There ain't no satisfaction talking to you, Michael Whipple."

The professor dropped into the store that day.

"How are the dreams coming along?" He inquired carelessly.

"Dreams?" Michael repeated. "Oh, you're thinking of that dream book."

"I'm always interested in dreams," said the professor as he absent-mindedly took a cigar. "I've dreamt some of the most remarkable things—things you'd swear were real. The brain's a queer business; yes, Mr. Whipple, we don't know the half of it.

"Now this fellow Freud says dreams correspond to our desires, passions or ambitions, according as we don't get them satisfied; keep 'em down, as it were. Now a man who's in love—ever been in love, Mr. Whipple?"

Michael made an indeterminate sound in his throat.

"Oh, quite natural," said the professor reassuringly. "If I had a dollar for every girl I've been in love with, I'd be rich. I wouldn't give a whoop for any man that didn't know the fatal passion and didn't know how to get free of it.

"That's what makes a man, Mr. Whipple. Strength of character—independence. Speaking for myself, if I had let myself get tied up to some Jane, where would I be today? Working for some slave driver at twenty-five per. A genius ain't got no right to get married. He wont rise in the world. A wife is the power of gravity that pulls him down; keeps him earth-bound, as it were. Love the ladies if you want, but for Gawd's sake, don't marry them.

"Now the man that finds his love ain't reciprocated—I mean that don't get what he's looking for, might get to dreaming at nights. And I believe that dream might be of him flying, eh?"

He shot his blue shaded chin forward and stared at Michael.

"Well, if that don't beat creation!" gasped his auditor.

"I'm a bit of a mind reader, amongst my many other remarkable talents acquired during my travels all over the world," said the professor lightly. "Did you say you sometimes dreamt of flying? Soaring into the air as lightly as a bird?"

"I never would have believed it," said Michael in awed conviction, "but you sure have got me to rights, Professor. Flying, that's the thing. I keep dreaming I'm rising off the

ground, just as easy as walking."

The professor nodded his head with an air of great satisfaction. He hesitated, then leaned over the counter and lowered his voice.

"I know now that I've made a remarkable discovery, Mr. Whipple. Only I don't want to be too previous. The mind's a very sensitive mechanism. See! I don't want to do anything to disturb it. So I want you to be careful of yourself for the next few days till I can get some things from New York. If I were you, I'd lock my window at nights."

"I don't get you, Professor," said Michael, wrinkling his brow.

"Don't worry. Just my little way; hocus pocus, hanky panky, eh. But there's money in it, big money. Millions, Mr. Whipple, millions. Say, drop in tonight and have a chat with me. How about it?"

"Yes, I guess I can do that."

"That's the boy. And go easy on the eating. Digestion's a good friend when it's in order, but when it ain't—— Well, you know, you don't need me to tell you. A word to the wise. Nuff said. Tonight then."

MICHAEL stood for a long time staring after his visitor had hastened away. In all his reading, which was strictly confined to detective fiction, he had never encountered such a mystery.

What lay behind this concern as to his diet and his window, coupled with the promise of millions? Was it some kind of insurance scheme or what? He would go easy with this fellow.

His apprehensions did not, however, prevent him making his appearance at the professor's front door that evening. It was opened by his host, who, to the visitor's amazement, wore a species of ornate bathrobe of black satin adorned with strange symbols.

"Come right in," said the professor, smiling saturninely.

He led Michael into a room crowded from floor to ceiling with a collection of bewildering objects. On the walls hung several posters depicting a dark gentleman wearing a turban and long robe similar to that which the professor was wearing. Curled about the figure was an interrogation-mark which on closer inspection turned out to be a cobra. At top and bottom was the printed legend:

Who is he? Rajah Mahatma the Wonder Worker of the East in his astounding and incredible Marvels of Mystery.

As Michael took in this work of art with a proper registration of emotions on his face, the professor chuckled.

"My stage monniker. Pretty good, ain't it? I don't suppose you ever saw me in vaudeville, Mr. Whipple, but I can tell you I'm a wow. I could work every week in the year if I wanted to, but I wont. No, sir, I lay off to get new tricks and keep the act one jump ahead of the other magicians.

"And all this truck you see here is stuff I use or used to use in the act. Here's my Cabinet of Death. Put a woman in, stick these swords through it till it's like a pin-cushion. *Ooly, mooly, om pom, Siva Ganesh Bramaputra!* and out she pops, unharmed; not a scratch on the skin you'd love to touch.

"And this here's my Pompeian Conflagration Illusion. Burn a woman to ashes in it. See that sheet of plate glass. I shoot a living girl through from a cannon. It's a marvel. It's a scientific impossibility, you say. It's contrary to nature. Mr. Whipple, there ain't nothing contrary to nature in my business, that you can see for yourself.

"Now we have my original levitation apparatus. Place the girl here. Make a few passes with my hands.

La Bella is asleep. She rises into the air without visible support. I pass a ring of metal from head to toe thus —observe closely. The ring passes without obstruction. La Bella is upheld in the air by the power of my will. Marvelous! How does he do it? Wires? No! Ask Mahatma the Wonder Worker. Will he tell? Not on your sweet life."

Michael, who had subsided into an easy-chair, found some difficulty in closing his mouth kept so long agape.

"It do beat all creation!" he murmured dazedly.

"One of my best tricks—that is with the girl, of course, but it can be improved upon. Just think now if I could do it without any apparatus, without assistance from anyone.

"If my subject could rise into the air, as easy as flying. Ye Gods, Mr. Whipple, I could ask two thousand a week—three, and get it. Yes, get it. They'd be falling all over me to hand me contracts. I'd be a headliner for life."

"But surely it ain't possible," suggested Michael timidly.

"Ha!" shouted the professor triumphantly. "There's where you make the big mistake of your life. It has been done. Yes, sir. It has been done. I think I asked you if you had ever heard of the medium, Home. Well, let me tell you Home had the power of suspending himself in the air, and moving in it from one spot to another. There is the testimony of scientists, noblemen, people of distinction and reputation who swore to having seen him perform the feat.

"Why, Home on one occasion rose into the air in a lighted room; no possible chance of trickery; none. He passed through a window, eighty feet above the ground, floated around and in again by another window. If Home were alive today I'd pay him a thousand dollars a week for life. For life, Mr. Whipple. A man could do a lot on a thousand per, eh? Could you?"

Michael was understood by his questioner to say that he fancied he could.

"A pipe dream!" continued the professor controversially, "an opium hallucination, a dope's delusion, you say. A Flight of Fancy. 'Jerusalem' —that's a good name for the act. Mahatma's sensational spectacle, 'The Flight of Fancy!' Excuse me while I note that down.

"Now, sir, if you think I'm talking through my hat, which can be done— I have the hat somewhere around— you're mistaken. The feat can be performed; it will be performed before I am fifty-two weeks older. But enough of business, Mr. Whipple. When I get talking tricks, there's no holding me down. Oh, just one thing, have you any ties?"

"You mean down to the store," said Michael regretfully. "No, I don't handle that class of goods."

"I meant attachments. Family ties—relations."

"Oh, I see. No, not to speak of," said Michael reflectively.

The professor looked at him suspiciously.

"Trust me. It wont go no further. Divorced, eh?"

"Gosh, no!"

"Well, you said you didn't want to speak of it. No ties, then?"

"My sister Sarah's all the family."

"Sister, eh. That's all right. And you ain't contemplating marriage, eh?"

Michael's Adam's apple quivered slightly.

"Girls these days want something more than I can give them," he murmured dolefully. "No! Looks like I was running in the bachelor class the rest of my life."

The professor's face cleared as if by the magic in which he was such an adept.

"Well, it's growing late. Sorry to break up a pleasant evening, but time flies, and the early bird, etcetera, and so forth and so on."

Michael took the hint and said "good night." It was not till he was outside that he realized his curiosity was still unsatisfied.

He knew no more about the professor's projects, nor how he was involved in them, and the volume of rapid talk had so confused him that when he went to bed he could recall little of it.

He sure was some talker, but that came of his being an actor. Gosh, he certainly was beginning to see life. It wasn't everyone that had the chance to get next to an actor.

OH, SO easy! Nothing to it. Just spread out your arms, take a gentle breath and rise serenely into the air. Up and up, over the garage roof and on. It was the most delightful and triumphant sensation in the world; only all at once a clutch of iron on his wrist. He was falling, falling.

"Michael! Michael! Oh, my God, what are you doing?"

With a shock Michael Whipple came to his waking senses. His hands clawed a cold and slippery surface. There were hands upon his wrists, an agonized voice imploring.

In a swift moment of realization he knew he was clinging to a window-sill; though how he came to be there he had no idea; and his bare chilled feet were kicking into space. The voice was Martha's and hers the face dimly seen in front of him.

"Try, try, Michael. You must!"

With a supreme effort Michael drew himself up and slithered over the window-sill, drawn in by the weight of his lady love, who thereupon burst into tears.

"Oh, how could you?" she sobbed.

"Martha, Martha!" protested Michael, gasping. "I ain't going to harm you. How in the name of peace did I get here—out of my bed."

He struggled to his feet in horror.

"I ain't dressed. I must have been walking in my sleep. Yes, that's it. Walking in my sleep and climbing."

Without a word Martha went to a closet, and, snatching out some garment, handed it to him with averted eyes.

"Pa's old raincoat. Put that on this minute."

Michael slipped it on over the shrunken flannel pajamas he was wearing.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," moaned Martha, her moment of courage gone again. "If anyone saw you. Oh, dear."

"Yep," agreed Michael dolefully. "I'd best get out at once. Don't take on so. I don't blame you being scared. Gosh, this is some shock to me. I never did such a thing in my life before. Sleepwalking and coming to you, of all persons."

"I guess I was on your mind, maybe, when you went to sleep," suggested Martha.

The idea seemed to please her, for she repeated the remark with a certain amount of pride.

Michael was quick to see the beauty of the idea.

"You're right, Martha, you're right. I was thinking of you; and naturally, when I started sleepwalking, I came to you."

"Oh, Michael, you do love me?"

"Love ain't the word," said Michael mysteriously. "Sleeping or waking, it's all one to me where you're concerned. Gosh, though, what's to be done?"

"Just one thing, Michael," said Martha firmly from the further side of the bed. "You're going to get out of here at once."

"You're right, Martha," said Michael submissively. "Beats me how

I got up to this window. I could show some of these young fellows something."

"That'll do, Michael. 'Pride cometh before a fall.' What are you doing? Are you plumb crazy?" she added hastily as he made for the window. "You go downstairs and let yourself out, and if you let anyone see you, I'm through with you for good. As it is, I'm that ashamed I don't know as I'll ever be able to look you in the face again."

"I ain't done nothing," said Michael aghast. "I can't help being so crazy about you, I go sleepwalking to your window, like that fellow in the play —what's his name?"

"Romeo?"

"That's the fellow."

"Well, you'll be a nice kind of Romeo if you catch cold. Here! Put on them rubbers and go."

She heard the downstairs door close softly. For a time she sat up in bed still in a flutter of apprehension, which must have been good for her mental activities, for she came to a sudden and what would an hour earlier have been a rash decision.

It would be a fine thing if Michael were to make an innocent mistake in his sleepwalking and visit the wrong house, where his intentions would be cruelly misunderstood. Measures must be taken at the first opportunity to see that this danger and others attached to it were nipped in the bud.

How Michael reached his home, and how to his bewilderment he found both back and front door locked, and had to shinny up the porch and into his bedroom with chattering teeth, need not be detailed.

It was a memory which he was only too eager to wipe off the slate, and he gave heartfelt thanks that he had escaped waking up Sarah, who slept at the back of the house, and avoided running into anyone in the village. He had no idea that the professor had been a spectator.

TWO days earlier in response to a special delivery letter to New York, several large cases had been deposited at the professor's house, and all day long he was engaged in mysterious operations in his bedroom facing Michael's.

That night, which beheld Michael's escapade, a belated automobilist swishing through the mud of the silent and deserted streets of the village was amazed to see the upper part of a house illuminated on its exterior by a light of such brilliance streaming out of a window across the way that it could only come from a searchlight.

Only too conscious of the liquid cargo he was carrying in contravention of the law, he smelled menace in the phenomenon and jammed his foot on the gas. It was not until he was a couple of miles nearer New York that it occurred to him some movie company might be taking a night picture; but later on he dismissed the idea as fantastic.

Someone had been laying low for him and he was darn lucky to get through the ambuscade without a hold-up. It was time to change his route.

He might have been more easy in his mind had he been able to see behind the shield of dazzling light. Professor Potts, breathing heavily and with eyes nearly popping out of his head, was turning the crank of the motion picture camera he had rented.

"My Gawd," he gasped at intervals. "I bet I can get twenty-five hundred a week easy. No, three thousand, maybe four, if he don't break his neck. Whew! I guess I got enough footage to make a good showing. This light'll wake up the town. Yep, I've shot enough."

With shaking hands he slipped the

cap over the lens and snapped off the switches of his powerful lamps. Half an hour later he was in bed, his lips moving. He was not counting sheep, however, but millions of money.

When morning came he left for New York, carrying in addition to a suitcase a package which he was guarding with unusual care.

It was a very chastened Michael who went about his business for the next four days. When he thought of Martha he groaned. It was firmly planted in his mind by his gardening conscience that he had committed not a crime, perhaps, but a breach of etiquette which she would be a long time getting over.

No lady can stand for a visit such as he had made, even with mitigating circumstances.

He made up his mind to wait a little, though the more daring side of him, which he kept in seclusion, prompted him to go and see her. But when he thought of his appearance that night, his spirit quailed. He must have been a regular figure of fun.

And so lonely was he that he welcomed the return of the professor, who late one afternoon popped his head into the store.

"I want to see you tonight," he said. "Without fail, eh? How're you feeling? You look kinda peeked. Well, we'll get you over that. Eight o'clock, see?"

Michael saw, and at eight o'clock was sitting amidst the professor's paraphernalia, smoking a cigar, and ready to listen.

"Well," said the professor, who seemed sparkling with energy, "I've done the trick all right, and no mistake. I've been to New York and seen the parties I was after. I got them all lined up and showed them what I had to offer, and did they fall for it? They did. They did. I convinced them that far that they made an offer for the first option on your services."

"My services?" ejaculated Michael. "I don't get you."

He ran a nervous finger around the inner edge of his collar.

"Precisely," said the professor. "Well, that's what I'm doing now, telling you. D'ye mind if I put on my robe? Seems more natural to me when I talk show. Yes, sir, you're made for life, thanks to yours truly. Now be prepared, sit tight. Don't get worried or flustered. There's nothing supernatural in it. Absolutely natural, scientific, and O. K., the genuine article.

"You're one of nature's phenomena and, thank heavens, one of nature's gentlemen; that makes it a million times easier for all of us concerned. I ain't studied your character for nothing.

"Now I've been in India and Egypt and there ain't much that can knock me off my pins. I've seen a boy put coals of fire on his bare head and hold them there long enough to boil a pot, and not a burn or mark. I've seen every trick and no fakes, tricks that made even me sit up and take notice, and I'm a magician, the King Performer of the Big Time.

"But I tell you when just by accident, as it were, I set eyes on you doing your act, I nearly passed out. Yes, sir, passed out. I thought I sure had 'em.

"Say, the stuff you get now is fierce; but when I seen you do it again and just as easy, I got the big idea. See! It was my chance and it was yours, and there was millions in it. Millions for both of us. Levitation extraordinary."

MICHAEL repeated the phrase feebly.

"You know what I mean," continued the professor briskly, "this rising into the air. You recall my

mentioning Home, the medium, who had the power of floating through the air. Well, sir, you got that same power. You are the modern Home."

"Whatsat?" said Michael, sitting up suddenly. "Me float in the air. No, sir. I never did no such thing in my life."

The professor transfixed him with a glittering eye.

"What's your impression of me? That I'm a saphead? That money don't mean nothing to me? Well, you're wrong. I only put my money on a sure thing. Didn't I go to the trouble of getting a battery of studio lights and a camera to take your pictures? Does that look like business or don't it?"

"You got a picture of me?" said Michael aghast. "Gosh—not floating in the air?"

"Light as a bubble," said the professor solemnly. "Pictures; I have hundreds of 'em. Yes, sir, as pretty a reel as was ever run off. Naturally, you don't know about your power, seeing as you do your stunt in your sleep."

A wave of recollection swept over Michael. Sarah's reproach of muddy feet; strange unaccountable footprints on high roofs; his nocturnal and batlike clinging to Martha's window; his repeated dreams of flight.

His hair stood on end. He started to rise. He would get out of here right away. He was scared stiff.

"Sit still," said the professor commandingly. "What's your hurry? I tell you there's nothing to be alarmed about. Just happens you have a power not given to the rest of us—a throw-back to some time when we could all fly. What's queer about it? Ain't there angels?

"And you believe in the Bible, don't you? Well, the Bible says—'And the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven.' You wouldn't want to go against the Bible? No, I thought not."

"But it don't seem right," stammered Michael. "Why, the idea gives me the creeps. And, my heavens, you ain't wanting me to do that in a show before a lot of folks I never seen before?"

The professor coughed as though irritated.

"As I said before, there is positively no danger. Keep your seat. Just let me show you something. Nothing to scare you. A work of art. We have here an enlargement of one of the little pictures of the movie reel. Just cast your eyes on that, and tell me if you ever beheld anything prettier or more educational. Educational!

"Yes, think of the joy and happiness you will bring to the hearts of thousands, millions, of less gifted mortals. You, a step lower than the angels, pointing out to what we may attain. Nature's prodigy, Michael Whipple the Flying Man."

"M. W. the F. M." raised a pallid face from the photograph. It showed the front of his house, and suspended in air about the level of the upper window, himself, floating as the professor had stated, without visible support, light as a bubble.

"Gosh! Is that me?" he sighed.

"No other," said the professor precisely. "You see how natural, how simple the feat appears to us, but to the countless millions to whom we will present our unparalleled spectacle, how awe-inspiring, mysterious, miraculous."

Michael rose to his feet and set his jaw firmly.

"No, sir, I could never do it. I'm a self-respecting man, professor, and you couldn't hire me to go on no stage and make a monkey of myself."

"Monkey nothing. I'm asking you to be an angel. There's some differ-

ence between a tail and a pair of wings, ain't there."

The professor's suavity was fading away as though under the rubbing of some patent cleanser.

Michael's hand involuntarily went to his shoulder blades.

"Oh, you ain't got wings," said the professor sharply. "You don't need no flappers to fly. That's what makes the act. Now, see here, be sensible, Mr. Whipple."

"Once and for all, I ain't going on no stage," gasped Michael.

"Be sensible," persisted the professor. "If you was Edison, would you say you wasn't going to give the world the electric light and the phonograph? Don't tell me if you was Marconi, when you found out the wireless, you'd have buried yourself and your secret alive. No, sir, all them folk give the world the benefit of their discoveries. I'm asking you to be a human benefactor.

"My Gawd, the good you could do. The world's waiting for you. And what do you do? You say 'No, I ain't going on no stage.' Is that the spirit to show? You ain't no hog, Mr. Whipple. That don't suit you. You're a sort of angel, d'ye see? Give to the world, Mr. Whipple; give generously."

"And you think, maybe, I'd be doing something big," said Michael, beginning to surrender to the vision.

"Big? It ain't to be measured. It's —it's overpowering. God, when I think of it, my heart grows so large it nearly bursts."

MICHAEL hesitated.

"If I was to think it over," he suggested.

The professor frowned.

"I got to give an answer right away. In this business you got to act snappy. And outside of the good you'll do humanity, there's the good you'll do yourself. See here now, money's a great power. You can make your dreams come true with money. Is there anything, any one thing you're held back from doing by the want of money, is there?"

Michael closed his eyes for an instant, and miraculously there passed across the stage of his imagination the figure of Martha, Martha who had waited so long for him.

He opened his eyes.

"Yes, I guess there is," he said mournfully.

"Good!" snapped the professor. "Never mind what it is, I can bring it to pass."

He hesitated, then with an air of great and stern sacrifice went to a desk in the corner, pulled out a piece of tinted paper and handed it to Michael.

The document bore the name of a bank, several illegible signatures, and a flattering inscription which read: *Pay to the order of Cash*, $1,000—*One thousand dollars.*

"Looks like a check," he said staring at the paper.

The professor swallowed an imaginary obstruction in his gullet.

"It is. Check for a grand, one thousand berries. And what do you think I'm going to do with it? Burn it up, tear it up, give it to the first bum who asks me for a dime to get a cup of coffee? No, sir. I'm going to present this handsome check to Mr. Michael Whipple gratis and for nothing."

"Well, I be jiggered," said Michael, as he handled the paper gingerly.

"There's nothing phoney about it. It's the real thing. Just endorse it at the bank and they'll collect for you. But I ain't done yet, Mr. Whipple. That's only a sample. How would you like to make the same every week? It pays to fly."

"Every week—a thousand a week."

"Guaranteed for forty-six weeks in the year at least."

The vista thus opened up was too much for Michael. He was bereft of speech. Forty-six thousand dollars. By Gosh, Martha would have the swellest fur coat he could buy her; he'd give Sarah enough to live on by herself; give her the old house . . .

"Well," said the professor suavely once more, "it ain't so worse. How about it?"

"Seems like I couldn't believe it, but——"

"Money talks, eh?" interjected the professor rapidly. "It's a perfectly fair offer, and I stand to make it good. You accept?"

"I guess maybe I had better," said Michael. "Yep, and as you say it ain't like acting the monkey; it's educational."

"The greatest thing that ever happened in the history of humanity. Now that's settled. There's just one leetle problem," the professor tapped a lean finger on his brow. "So far as we know you can only do your act while you sleep. You never did it when you were awake, did you?"

"I never knew a darn thing about it till you told me."

"So—hum—well, I'm afraid you'll have to get used to sleeping in the daytime, from one o'clock to eleven, matinee and evening shows."

"Whatsat?" Michael groaned dismally. "Say, does that mean I've got to keep awake all night? That's some gay life."

"It's unfortunate, but the point is—is it worth a thousand a week to you, or ain't it? Unless——"

The professor paused and let his long sleeves slide up his bare and sinewy arms. For a moment as the magician stood flexing his muscular fingers, Michael thought he was about to dart upon and strangle him.

"Unless," the professor resumed in a voice grown smooth and caressing, "unless I induce artificial sleep; in other words put you into a trance; in short, hypnotize you. Then I would be sure of no failure.

"In a natural sleep you might keep on sleeping, and not float and the act would do a fine brodie on the stage. See, we must run no risks. However, maybe we can fix that. Just let me show you a fascinating novelty."

He set in motion a shining disk set with mirrors, in front of which was a brilliant light.

"Just keep your eyes on this and see what happens. See the little bird pop out. Now eyes on the disk. Steady, steady."

The disk began to revolve faster and faster with a swirl of glittering facets. Michael watched it curiously as it seemed to grow to enormous proportions, to come nearer and nearer. He wondered dimly why his eyes felt so heavy.

Ah! He felt a breath on his eyes. Someone was patting his cheeks. He opened his eyes with a startled "Say!"

In front of him stood the professor in a state of exaltation.

"Marvelous!" he shouted. "Marvelous. You rose and floated at my command, just a few inches from the ceiling. See, if you look up, you can see the mark on it where you touched it with your cigar."

"What d'ye mean?" gasped Michael, staring upward.

"Just this," said the professor, "I hypnotized you and up you went. How do you feel?"

"Same as usual," his subject replied. "Is that what hypnotism is? Just going to sleep for a little?"

"All there is to it," said the professor quickly.

As though performing a trick of legerdemain he produced a fountain-pen and a document.

"Here we are. Sign here. Agreement of partnership for three years.

option of renewal for three more, for your sole services."

He rattled off a number of details which rattled off Michael's dazzled comprehension as peas falling on a taut drum head.

"Let me look it over before I sign?" he asked.

"Sure! I'm not selling you a gold brick. I'm selling you a gold mine, a mint. Everything's square and above board. I want you, and I'm willing to pay for you."

Michael signed, and the professor blotted the deed carefully.

"Now that's settled. We go to New York Monday morning to give a showing. I'm expecting their O. K. on my date, any minute. I suppose you can get away."

"I guess I could shut up the store that day."

"Store. You're through with the store for good. Sell it."

Michael sighed.

"I'm kinda fond of the old store; but, well, I guess I can fix a sale. I've —I've got one or two little things to attend to before Monday."

"Go ahead with them," said Professor Potts magnanimously.

A rapturous smile stole into Michael's face.

"I will," he announced simply.

BRIGHTEST and earliest of visitors at the bank next morning was Mr. Michael Whipple, bent upon an interview with Mr. Walsh.

"What can I do for you, Michael?" asked the banker.

Michael produced his check.

"Nice little check this," said the banker.

"Yes, it's real pretty," Michael agreed. "New York bank?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess it's O. K. I s'pose you could handle a few more like it?"

"As many as you like," said the banker cordially. "Bring them along. We'll take good care of you. Now what do you want done with this? Say, if you're looking for investments, I can put you wise to some bargains."

Michael fidgeted.

"I've been thinking, if it was reasonable, I'd like to buy that piece of waste ground—old Baxter's, ain't it? Lies along the railroad this side of Joe Webster's."

"You can get it for $1,500, Michael, but for pity's sake what do you want with that dump?"

"I just kinda fancy it, Mr. Walsh. Yep, I want you to go ahead and buy it for me, cash."

"Well, everyone to his taste, Michael. I'll telephone Baxter right away."

Followed by Mr. Walsh's pitying glance, Michael came out of the bank. He was passing by Martha's house, the old Jenkins house, and he noticed her sitting sewing at the bay window. Only for an instant he hesitated, then with a determined step ascended the steps.

A flush came into Martha's cheeks as she opened the door.

"Well, you are a stranger, Michael. Wont you come in?"

"Guess this is a queer time of day to be calling," he said, a trifle nervously, "but I just happened to be passing, and there you was at the window, pretty as a picture. Gosh, don't this gas bother you?"

He stooped to adjust the tube of the malodorous gas stove.

"Thank you, Michael," Martha said, smiling, and, at her smile, his apprehensions quieted.

His escapade was not to be held against him.

"I thought I did smell gas, but this house is so cold, I'm near froze working."

"Time you had a real up-to-date house, Martha."

"I guess it is," she said, biting off a thread and looking at him.

There was a new jauntiness about him, a dancing buoyancy about his spare figure, a suppressed but happy gleam in his sharp features. "Like a bird," thought Martha, as she added, "Why ain't you tending to business?"

"I have been," said Michael proudly. "Just been over to the bank. Me and Walsh is putting through a deal. Just bought that piece of waste land that old Baxter's been aching to sell for ages.

"You remember my telling you about that fellow that came into the store about a month ago; and we got talking, and he said he was looking for a factory site, and I said, why not look over that lot, near the railroad, see. So he said he would, but he never came back.

"Well, who do you think I saw first thing this morning? That same fellow with a swell-looking man in a car, and making for Baxter's lot. So I chases myself to Walsh and tells him to get Baxter right away and I'm buying the lot."

"But what you going to do with it?"

"Sell it and double, maybe triple, my money."

"My land, Michael, you ain't got the money, surely."

Michael pulled out his bankbook and, opening it at the last entry, laid it on her lap.

"One thousand dollars, and more to follow."

"Michael!"—she lifted apprehensive eyes to him—"what you been doing?"

"Well, if that ain't like a woman," he retorted, smiling whimsically. "No, I ain't been robbing a bank nor yet bootlegging. That money was paid for a job I did."

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her all, but in time he recollected the professor's admonition to say nothing at present.

"It was honestly earned, Martha," he said earnestly. "Say, how would you like to be riding with me in the spring in a swell car?"

"Why not a flying machine when you're dreaming things like that?"

"I guess I ain't got the nerve to go up in one of them machines. No, I guess it'll be a gasoline buggy. Any particular kind you fancy?"

HE SPOKE lightly, but his eyes were eagerly on her, and meeting them she laid down her sewing and spread her hands out on her apron. He could see they were trembling, and a wave of tenderness spread over him.

"Martha," he said, "me and you've been thinking of marrying for a long time. Surely there ain't no use waiting, wasting the precious years. It's an awful nice bright day. How soon can you be ready to go with me?"

"Oh, Michael, I could never——" she protested, but there was a smile so youthful and gay behind the tears in her eyes that Michael thought she had never looked prettier. "I don't know what's come over you."

"Why?"

"You've turned so masterful-like, but I—I like it. But what'll folks say?"

Michael chuckled his intended opinion of comment.

"We shan't say a word about it—that is, if you're willing, Martha—until I settle Sarah's hash. I guess it'll be a kinda shock to her and——"

In some miraculous way Martha was in his arms.

"Anything you say, Michael," she whispered. "My, it's lucky I just made myself a new dress and trimmed a hat."

Secretly, as though upon a crime, the happiest pair in the world stole

out of the old Jenkins house. Later they emerged from the house of the Reverend Mr. Withers, and Michael was talking more rapidly, persuasively and convincingly than he had ever done in his life. The alchemy of marriage was already in operation.

IT WAS a transformed Michael Whipple who descended from the train at the New York Terminal and got into a taxicab with Professor Potts. He wore the expression of one who after a long search had discovered the secret of happiness.

"Now, there's nothing to be afraid of," the professor impressed on him, though of the two he appeared to be more on edge. "Just act natural to the gentlemen. They're big bugs, but regular guys. Don't worry. Just leave it all to me. I'll do the barking."

He hurried him up an alley, through a dismal door into a whitewashed passage, and onto a stage where there were already gathered a number of gentlemen smoking furiously in defiance of notices which in bold letters sternly forbade the offence. Michael gazed at them and out into the dark cave of the house, its rows of seats shrouded in dust covers.

"Morning, all," said Professor Potts briskly. "I appreciate the favor; I sure do. But what I got here is something so special I knew you'd give me a showing extraordinary.

"Now, Mr. Gordon, permit me to introduce my w o n d e r, Michael Angel, the flying man. Nature's most astounding prodigy. You've seen the reel. Now, I take great pleasure in introducing to your notice the real marvel himself. Meet the gentlemen, Mr. Whipple."

Michael's hand was shaken by a variety of hands.

"Now, you can see for yourselves what Mr. Whipple is, a real he-man. There's no fake about him, no fake about what he can do. It is the act marvelous," continued the professor. "Not a scrap of apparatus, no wires, bars, trapdoors, electricity, mirrors. Not a thing but Nature, wonderful Nature.

"I stand here ready to substantiate every promise I made to you; to let you examine me and my friend, under as brilliant a light as you want. Can I have all the lights? That's the style. The brighter the better.

"Now, gentlemen, I am going to put Michael Angel, which'll be his professional name, to sleep, release the subconscious (that's the technical phrase), but I don't have to hand you gentlemen the encyclopedia. Just a second till I plug this disk wire.

"Now, all ready. You needn't move away. Stand as close as you like. Remember what I told you. This man can rise into the air; in fact, he flies. He flies! Just think what that means! Full-page spreads in all the papers. All the scientific bugs in the country flocking, talking, writing, discussing, marveling.

"Ye gods, it will be the sensation of the world. I don't mind telling you I got a theory about it. You've heard of these suppressed desires; however, 'nuff said.

"All right! Ready! Now, Michael, just sit down quietly in this chair. Don't think of a thing, but you want to fly. Fix your eyes on the disk. That's the style. I want you to go to sleep—to sleep—sleep."

The stage of the Premier Vaudeville House has been the scene of many spectacles calculated to exhaust a press agent's vocabulary, but none so startling as that exhibited to the hard-boiled judges assembled this morning.

Mr. Merry of the Amalgamated Booking Office came near to gulping down his cigar butt as Michael, slowly rising to his feet, teetered on them; then with a seraphic smile extended his arms horizontally, and gently ascended into the air.

For a moment he swayed some six feet above the stage, like some tender plant stem caressed by a wandering breeze. Beads of perspiration stood out on the professor's corrugated brow as, standing almost on the footlights, he kept his eyes steadily on the prodigy, apparently wafting him upward with a fanning motion of his hands.

"Jes—!"

The professor flashed a lightning glance at the little group craning their faces upward to the battens in the flies.

"Sh! If you please, gentlemen!"

FROM behind some scenery stacked against the back wall of the stage came a smothered exclamation, instantly suppressed.

Michael's head perilously grazed the rows of bulbs overhead which illuminated him with such brilliancy; then, as the professor's hands in a gesture coaxing but commanding summoned him to earth once more, he descended smoothly to the stage, where once more he swayed upon the points of his toes.

"A wow!" gasped Mr. Merry.

"Stupendous!" ejaculated the professor, staring back stage, from which came a slight scuffling as though the house cat was sharpening its claws on some prop. "But wait! I ain't through. Wait. I got to act snappy while I got him under the influence.

"I now propose to show you the flying wonder leaving the stage in defiance of the laws of gravity. Get that—defies the laws of gravity; sailing out over the foots, and ascending to the roof of the house, which he will touch in plain view of all beholders. He will then descend with the utmost ease and grace, returning to the stage and getting the hand which he deserves for his daring and intrepidity."

He paused and frowned over the heads of the men facing him. "Back stage, there, sh! I must ask for silence; perfect silence for the demonstration supreme. Till that is over reserve your comments and sit on your hands, gentlemen. Now, Mr. Whipple! You are obeying the command of my powerful will."

Still smiling as though in a happy dream, Michael rose a few inches into the air. He was floating out toward the footlights when there was an interruption.

Two figures surged forward from their place of concealment behind the stack of scenery. One was a brilliantly decorated young lady in a fur coat and high boots of patent leather, who was impatiently shaking off the grasp of a more soberly dressed woman.

"Heartless nothing!" said the first. "All I said was, 'Hit the roof, baby!' We've been watching the act back there, her and me, though who she is, Gawd knows. I never seen her before, and she's been having fits. Scared to death the act's going to fall.

"Good grief, she give me a pinch that near took the skin offen me. And you can tell her with my compliments, Mr. Merry, who I am. And, what's more, I've that much feeling I cry every time I orders a baby squab from the menu."

"Ladies! Ladies!" expostulated Mr. Merry in agitated tones. "Cut out the rough stuff till the act's over. Can't you see we're busy, Miss Godiva?"

With outstretched arms, he tried to shoo them back.

"As an act of courtesy to a fellow performer. If you please!"

Michael, checked in mid air, was now wobbling in the dust-impregnated haze created by the hot footlights. The professor, in his concentration apparently deaf and blind to the attack which had been repelled, said in a sepulchral tone:

"Ascend, Michael!"

"No, he don't!" said a very decided voice.

The soberly dressed woman suddenly darted forward and made a grab at Michael's legs.

"Come down this minute, Michael. You ain't going to break your neck for no one. Come down!"

The professor wheeled to face her, and in that instant the spell was broken. Michael flopped to the stage, saved from going over into the orchestra pit by the arms of his preserver.

"I should think you'd be ashamed, the lot of you," said that lady with blazing eyes, "making him do them fool stunts and ordering him 'round like he was nobody. If there's any ordering Mr. Whipple, I'll tend to that myself. Yes, that's right, pick him up and, if he's hurt, I'll have the law on you."

Various hands lifted up the recumbent fallen angel and laid him in a chair.

"Who let this in?" demanded the Professor, with a snarl of fury. "My Gawd, you'd think this stage was Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. This ain't no public thoroughfare. Who are you, anyway?"

A gleam of comprehension crept into his eyes.

"Oh, I guess you're his sister. Sarah, ain't you. Now, Miss Whipple——"

"No such thing!" said the invader tartly, "and you ain't paying me no compliment."

The professor drew a long breath.

"What's that? You ain't his sister. Then, who are you? What's this man to you?"

"Everything," she answered fervently, then added with a touch of dignity, "I'm Martha Whipple, his wife!"

"His wife!" echoed the professor in a hollow voice.

BENDA never contrived such a mask of devastating fury as that which the professor's face assumed. In the twinkling of an eye, he lost the last shred of control.

"You're no gentleman!" gasped Martha as the epithets exploded about her burning ears.

"Potts!" expostulated Mr. Merry. "Professor! What the hell? Cut out the cursing on this stage."

The professor, disregarding the admonition, turned upon Michael slumped in his chair, still with a child-like smile on his face, all unconscious of the storm raging about him.

"You simp, you——"

The next thing Michael knew he was being slapped in the face. A bellowing crazed being whom dimly he recognized as his friend, the Professor, danced in front of him, shaking his fist and uttering oaths of so appalling a nature that Michael shrank back into the chair in which he still found himself sitting.

"Say! What's the matter? Didn't I fly?" he murmured, blinking.

"Did you fly?" repeated the Professor. "Listen to him. Ain't he mother's innocent child! What's the matter? Matter is you've queered the act, thrown away a fortune, and for what? To get married.

"Didn't you tell me you hadn't no ties, and all the time you was planning to get married. Oh, it's a crime. Hell! Don't you know there ain't no giving and taking in marriage in heaven? The angels don't marry.

"Thank Gawd, I took out an insurance against you getting married, so I'm in that much. We was all set to make millions. And now, you're flying's done for. You're anchored to earth, you—you—— Gawd, I can't think straight; anchored to earth by this here woman."

"Woman!" gasped Michael feebly as he turned his head. "Martha!"

"Oh, I wanted to see you fly," said the uninvited guest with a sob. "Ever since you told me I followed this man and you on the same train, and come here. The man at the door let me in, me being your wife; and I watched them near out of my senses with fear for you; and this girl here got fresh, and when he said for you to go away up to the roof, I couldn't stand it no longer. And this man, he abused me; such names—never in my born days——"

As though propelled from a catapult, Michael, the fallen angel, shot out of his chair.

"Say!" he demanded with dangerous quiet. "Did you insult this lady?"

"Lady?" echoed the professor with a hollow laugh left over from a distant period of trouping with Corse Payton.

The next instant he was rolling in the footlights.

"Come on," said Michael. "Let's beat it out of here before I get real mad and break somebody else's jaw. Those guys don't know a lady when they see one."

"Yes!" said Miss Godiva. "Take home your dicky bird, Martha, and put him back in his little cage."

A silence fell upon the stage as Michael and Martha shook its dust from their feet.

Mr. Merry rubbed his eyes with a flamboyant silk handkerchief.

"Speaking for myself, Professor," he said dubiously, "you certainly had us hypnotized. I sure could have sworn that little guy was flying; but you never could have bamboozled a whole audience."

"Bah! Talk sense!" said the professor bitterly, as he dusted his clothes. "I tell you he——" he broke off. "What's the use?"

"Oh, Michael," said Martha breathlessly as they emerged out into the daylight. "Oh dear, that money."

"Gosh! That's right," said Michael, stopping aghast. "Gosh, and I was meaning to fit you out like a princess. Maybe I'd better go back."

At that instant, Miss Godiva tripped past them with a beaming smile at Michael and a tilt of her nose for Martha.

"Michael!" said Martha firmly. "Come on. This is no place for you. I'd rather have you than ten millions; and you ain't done so bad. I came into town with Mr. Walsh, and he told me these automobile people was ready to close for that piece of land—ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand dollars! Whee!"

"So," added Martha, pressing his arm. "I'm just as glad this flying business fell through. I'd never have had a moment's peace of mind, knowing you being able to fly. You might fly too far, but I'll see," she added in the pride of possession, with a mysterious and tender intonation in her voice, "that you don't do no more flying."

Michael smiled just a trifle ruefully as the vision of millions faded from his mind; then his eyes twinkled.

"Well," he said with a brave smile, "forget it. And now, Mrs. Whipple, seeing we ain't had our honeymoon, what about starting? This looks like a mighty nice place for roast chicken and ice cream. Flying! Huh! I guess one angel in the family is a plenty."

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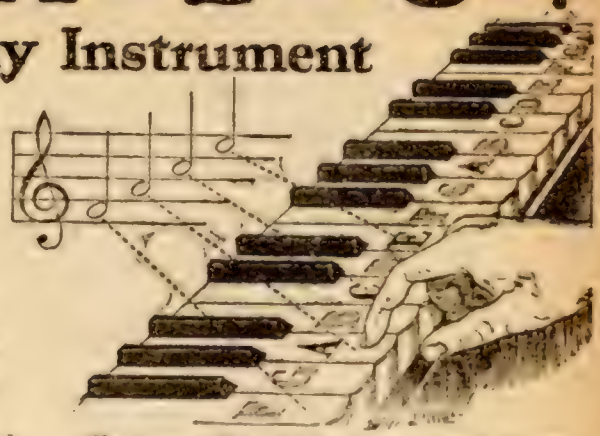

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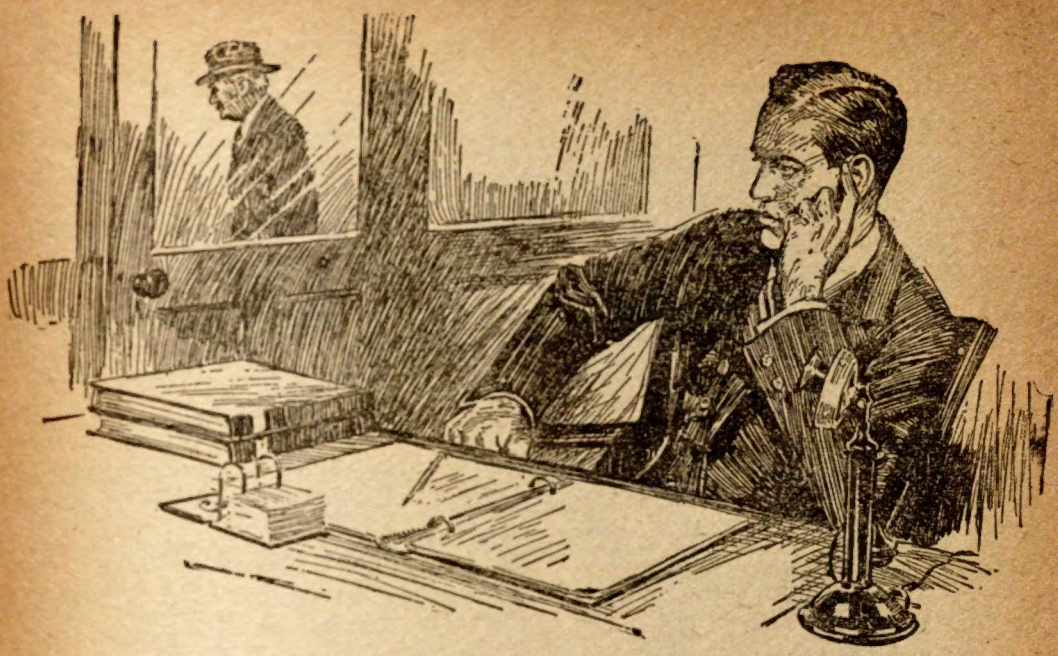

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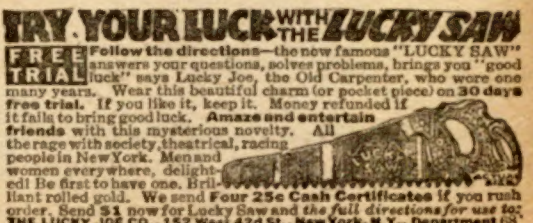

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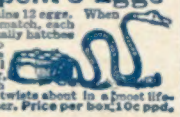

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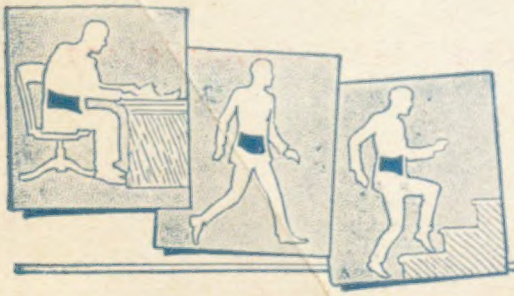

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